



Corsica

Includes »

Bastia.....	870
Cap Corse.....	874
Île Rousse.....	875
Calvi.....	876
Porto.....	879
Les Calanques.....	882
Ajaccio.....	882
Sartène.....	887
Bonifacio.....	888
Porto-Vecchio.....	891
Corte.....	893

Best Places to Eat

- » Auberge Santa Barbara (p888)
- » Pasquale Paoli (p876)
- » L'Altru Versu (p886)
- » Pâtisserie Casanova (p895)
- » Emile's (p878)

Best Places to Stay

- » A Pignata (p894)
- » Hôtel Demeure Castel Brando (p874)
- » Hôtel Kallisté (p885)
- » Hôtel La Villa (p878)
- » Chambre d'hôte Osteria di l'Orta (p893)

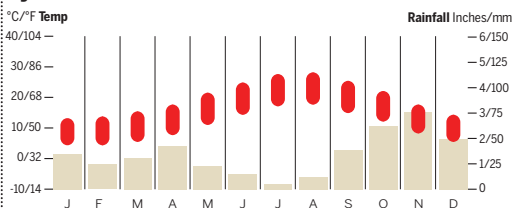
Why Go?

Corsica is for (beach) lovers. And culture buffs. And hikers. And divers. It combines vast stretches of shoreline with the beauty of the mountains, plenty of activities for your body and some rich history to engage your mind. Jutting out of the Med like an impregnable fortress, Corsica resembles a miniature continent, with astounding geographical diversity. Within half an hour, the landscape morphs from glittering bays, glitzy coastal cities and fabulous beaches to sawtooth peaks, breathtaking valleys, dense forests and enigmatic hilltop villages. The scenery that unfurls along the island's crooked roads will have you constantly stopping to whip out your camera.

Though Corsica's been officially part of France for over 200 years, it feels different from the mainland in everything from customs to cuisine, language and character, and that's part of its appeal.

When to Go

Ajaccio



March/April (Easter) Easter is marked by solemn procession and colourful Passion plays.

May and June The maquis is in full blossom, the scents are memorable and the vivid hues unforgettable.

July to September Get your tan on glistening beaches or explore the island's rugged heart.

Corsica Highlights

- 1 Cruise the sapphire waters of the **Réserve Naturelle de Scandola** (p880)
- 2 Explore the remote peninsula of **Cap Corse** (p874) by way of winding coastal roads
- 3 Mosey around the cobbled alleyways of mysterious **Sartène** (p887), preferably at Easter
- 4 Work your suntan and slip into turquoise waters at **Plage de Palombaggia** and **Plage de Santa Giulia** (p891)
- 5 Step back in time and wander amid enigmatic dolmens and menhirs at **Filitosa** or **Cauria** (p888)
- 6 Get active in grandiose scenery at **Col de Bavella** (p894)
- 7 Ride the **Tramway de la Balagne** (p879) for an unforgettable coastal journey
- 8 Discover your own pocket-sized island paradise for a day on the **Îles Lavezzi** (p889)
- 9 Wander the backstreets of **Bonifacio's citadel** (p888) for stunning seascapes as well as for the history
- 10 Bone up on your Bonaparte around Napoléon's hometown, **Ajaccio** (p882)



CORSICAN TEMPTATIONS

Cheese

Gourmands will delight in all the flavours and textures of Corsican cheeses, from hard, tangy Tomme Corse (semihard ewe's-milk cheese) to the king of the island's cheeses, Brocciu (a crumbly white ewe's- or goat's-milk cheese).

Charcuterie

Prisuttu (dry ham), *lonzu* (tender smoked fillet), *coppa* (shoulder), *figatellu* (liver sausage), *salamu* (salami-style sausage), *terriner de sanglier* (wild-boar pâté) – wherever you go, you'll find a wide array of cured meats on offer, made from free-range pigs that feed on chestnuts. Just make sure you buy it in speciality shops.

Sweet Treats

From *canistrelli* (biscuits made with almonds, walnuts, lemon or aniseed) and *frappe* (little fritters made from chestnut flour) to *fiadone* (a light flan made with cheese, lemon and egg) and *falculelli* (frittered Brocciu cheese served on a chestnut leaf), Corsica's dessert menu is sure to torment the sweet tooth. Oh, and there are devilish ice creams, too, with original flavours such as myrtle, Brocciu or chestnut.

Wine & Liqueurs

Corsica has nine AOC-labelled wines and countless fruit liqueurs, including Cap Corse Mattei. Areas to watch out for are Patrimonio, Cap Corse, Ajaccio, Sartène and Porto-Vecchio.

Olive Oil

La Balagne and L'Alta Rocca produce extremely aromatic olive oils, available direct from the producer.

Seafood

Fish lovers will be in heaven. Lobster, oysters, mussels, squid, sea bass... Corsica has them all, but stick to reputable fish restaurants.

History

From the 11th to 13th centuries Corsica was ruled by the Italian city-state of Pisa, superseded in 1284 by its arch-rival, Genoa. To prevent seaborne raids, a massive system of coastal citadels and watchtowers was constructed, many of which still ring the coastline.

In 1755, after 25 years of sporadic warfare against the Genoese, Corsicans declared their independence, led by Pascal Paoli (1725–1807). Under Paoli's rule they established a National Assembly and founded the most democratic constitution in Europe.

Corsicans made the inland town of Corte their capital, but the island's independence was short-lived. In 1768 the Genoese ceded Corsica to Louis XV, whose troops crushed Paoli's army in 1769. The island has since been part of France, except for 1794–96, when it was briefly under English domination.

A movement for Corsican autonomy was formed in the 1960s to combat what some perceived as France's 'colonialist' policy towards the island. In 1976, the Front de Libération Nationale de la Corse (FLNC) was created, and talk of autonomy increasingly turned to claims for full independence. By the 1990s the FLNC has broken into multiple splinter groups, most armed and mostly violent. This said, relatively few Corsicans support the separatist movements. In 2003 a long-awaited referendum, which would have granted the island greater autonomy, was rejected despite a nail-biting electoral race. Nevertheless, the nationalist issue remains a burning topic, but tourists are always made welcome.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Corsica has four airports: Ajaccio, Bastia, Calvi and Figari (north of Bonifacio). There are frequent flights to/from various French mainland

airports, including Paris, Marseille, Lyon and Nice, operated year-round by **Air France** (www.airfrance.com) and the Corsican home-grown **CCM Airlines**, also known as Air Corsica. There are also seasonal flights from Paris to Ajaccio and from Lyon and Paris to Bastia with **EasyJet** (www.easyjet.com), while **XL Airways** (www.xl.com) operates flights to Figari out of Paris.

From May to September, direct international flights are also available from a number of European countries, including the UK. EasyJet serves Ajaccio and Bastia from London Gatwick, while Ryanair flies to Figari. **Titan Airways** (www.titan-airways.co.uk) flies to Calvi from London Stansted. Outside the summer months, you'll have to look at flying via a French mainland airport.

BOAT

MAINLAND FRANCE Corsica has six ferry ports (Ajaccio, Bastia, Calvi, Île Rousse, Porto-Vecchio and Propriano) and can be reached from the ports of Nice, Marseille and Toulon. Contact the following companies:

Corsica Ferries (www.corsicaferries.com) Year-round from Nice to Ajaccio, Bastia, Calvi and Île Rousse, and from Toulon to Ajaccio, Bastia and Île Rousse. The crossing lasts from 5½ hours to 6¼ hours.

La Mériidionale (www.lameridionale.fr) Has year-round overnight sailings from Marseille to Ajaccio, Bastia and Propriano (all 12 hours).

Moby Lines (www.moby.it) Started a service from Toulon to Bastia in 2010.

SNCM (www.sncm.fr) From April to September, it operates speedy *navires à grande vitesse* (NGVs) from Nice to Île Rousse (3½ hours), Ajaccio (five hours) and Bastia (4½ hours). Normal ferries run from Marseille to Ajaccio (9¼ hours), Bastia (10 hours), Île Rousse (10 hours), Porto-Vecchio (13 hours) and Propriano (9¼ hours).

There can be as many as 10 boats a day in the high season, dropping to a single daily sailing in winter: reservations are essential in summer. The fare structure varies depending on your route, the crossing time, the class of comfort and the brand of your vehicle. Fares start at around €40 and rise to around €90 per person (one way), with various discounts offered throughout the year. Expect to pay up to €400 return for a car and two passengers via NGV from Nice to Ajaccio in July or August.

ITALY Between April and September or October, ferries operated by Corsica Ferries and Moby Lines link Corsica with the Italian ports of Genoa, Livorno and Savona, and Porto Torres on Sardinia. Fares from Italy are lower than from mainland France. They vary depending on the crossing time and route, with one-way trips starting as

low as €10 per adult. It costs from around €50 to transport a small car.

Operators include the following:

Corsica Ferries (www.corsicaferries.com) Livorno, Piombino and Savona to Bastia. Also serves Calvi and Île Rousse from Savona (June to August).

La Mériidionale (www.lameridionale.fr) Ferries year-round between Porto Torres (Sardinia) and Propriano.

Moby Lines (www.moby.it) Runs seasonal ferry services to Bastia from Genoa and Livorno. Also serves Bonifacio from Santa Teresa di Gallura (Sardinia).

Saremar (www.saremar.it) Runs seasonal ferry services between Santa Teresa di Gallura (Sardinia) and Bonifacio.

Getting Around

By far the best way to get around Corsica is by car, whether hired or brought from home, but navigating the island's narrow, twisting roads is not easy. A good road map is indispensable. The two IGN *Carte de Promenade* maps (No 73 for the north and No 74 for the south) at a scale of 1:100,000 are excellent. Bus services are lean and not very convenient. The train is an attractive, though limited, option, running through stunning countryside between Bastia and Ajaccio, with a branch route to Calvi.

BASTIA & CAP CORSE

Bastia

POP 44,000

Filled with heart, soul and character, the bustling old port of Bastia is a good surprise. Sure, it might not measure up to the sexy style of Ajaccio or the architectural appeal of Bonifacio, but it has an irresistible magnetism. Don't be put off by its hectic traffic, peeling paintwork and ramshackle tenement blocks. Bastia is a more authentic snapshot of modern-day Corsica, a lived-in city that's resisted the urge to polish up its image just to please the tourists. Allow yourself at least a day to take in the city's seething old port, compelling museum (reopened in 2010) and dramatic citadel.

Sights

Place St-Nicolas

TOWN SQUARE

Bastia's buzzing focal point is the 19th-century square of place St-Nicolas, which sprawls along the seafront between the ferry port and the harbour. Named after the

Be warned: surprisingly, many restaurants and hotels in Corsica don't accept plastic, and it's very rare for *chambres d'hôte* to take credit cards. Some places refuse cards for small amounts (typically under €15). And it's common to come across a reputable restaurant where the credit-card machine has been *en panne* (out of order) for several weeks. Always inquire first. Also note that ATMs are scarce in rural areas, especially in Cap Corse, which has only two ATMs, and the Alta Rocca (only one, in San Gavino di Carbinì). It's wise to stock up with euros beforehand.

patron saint of sailors – a nod to Corsica's seagoing heritage – the square is lined with plane trees and a string of attractive terrace cafés along its western edge, as well as a **statue of Napoléon Bonaparte**.

Terra Vecchia

HISTORIC QUARTER

A network of narrow lanes leads south towards the old port and the neighbourhood of Terra Vecchia, a muddle of crumbling apartments and balconied blocks. The shady **place de l'Hôtel de Ville** hosts Bastia's lively morning market from Tuesday to Saturday. One block to the west, don't miss the baroque **Chapelle de l'Immaculée Conception** (rue des Terrasses), with its elaborately painted barrel-vaulted ceiling; it briefly served as the seat of the short-lived Anglo-Corsican parliament in 1795. Further north is **Chapelle St-Roch** (rue Napoléon), known for its 18th-century organ and *trompe l'œil* roof.

Vieux Port

HARBOUR

Immediately south of Terra Vecchia is the Vieux Port (Old Port), Bastia's most picturesque area, ringed by pastel-coloured tenements and buzzy brasseries, as well as the twin-towered **Église St-Jean Baptiste**. The best views of the harbour are from the hillside park of **Jardin Romieu**, reached via a twisting staircase from the waterfront.

Citadel

HISTORIC DISTRICT

Behind Jardin Romieu looms Bastia's citadel, built from the 15th to 17th centuries as a stronghold for the city's Genoese masters. One of the citadel's landmarks, the **Palais des Gouverneurs** (Governors' Palace;

place du Donjon) houses **Musée d'Histoire de Bastia** (☎04 95 31 09 12; admission €5; ☺Tue-Sun 10am-6pm), which provides an overview of the history of the city. A few streets to the south, don't miss the majestic **Église Ste-Marie** (rue de l'Évêché) and the nearby **Église Ste-Croix** (rue de l'Évêché), featuring gilded ceilings and a mysterious black-oak crucifix, which was found in the sea in 1428.



Sleeping

Hôtel Central

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 31 71 12; www.centralhotel.fr; 3 rue Miot; d €85-100, ste €120-140; ☹☹) This family-run number set in a stately 19th-century building is very well priced for such a central location and offers 21 rooms wrapped with a retro feel (parquet or terracotta-tiled floors, period furnishings). Minuses: there's no lift and rooms aren't air-conditioned (the suites are, though).

Hôtel Les Voyageurs

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 34 90 80; www.hotel-lesvoyageurs.com; 9 av Maréchal Sébastiani; s €75-95, d €90-115; ☹☹) A good bet for picky travellers. What sets it apart are the buttermilk walls, modern-art prints and blindingly white bathrooms that contrast sharply with the more austere facade. There's covered parking (€7).

Hôtel Pietracap

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 31 64 63; rte de San Martino, Pietranera; d €92-215; ☹☹)

Life feels less hurried in this oasis of calm, about 3km north of Bastia. The rooms are nothing too out of the ordinary, but it's the leafy park, the hush, the sea views and the huge swimming pool that make this place special. It's also handy to the port.



Eating

You'll find endless restaurants around the old port and quai des Martyrs.

A Casarella

MODERN CORSICAN €€

(☎04 95 32 02 32; 6 rue Ste-Croix; mains €15-28; ☺Tue-Sun) Poised above the old port in the heart of the citadel, this restaurant boasts the loveliest terrace in Bastia. Tuck into innovative dishes based on organic Corsican produce – caramelised local pork, roasted cuttlefish with parsley – with the twinkling lights of the harbour below.

Raigi

ICE-CREAM PARLOUR €

(2 rue du Chanoine Colombani; scoops €1.50, ice-cream cups €4-19; ☺9am-12.30pm & 2-11pm



Tue-Sat) You say you're itching for an ice-cream fix? Good, because it's hard to resist the giant-sized ice-cream cups served at this longstanding venture.

Chez Vincent

CORSICAN €€

(☎04 95 31 62 50; 12 rue St-Michel; mains €9-22, menu €25; ☺lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) A Casarella's neighbour, Chez Vincent offers Corsican staples and wood-fired pizzas. The *assiette du bandit Corse* (€18.50) features a smorgasbord of local nosh, including stewed veal chestnuts, cured meats, ewe's-milk cheese, wild boar pâté and roast *figatellu* (liver sausage).

Le Bouchon

BISTRO €€

(☎04 95 58 14 22; 4bis rue St-Jean; mains €16-29, menu €25; ☺closed Wed & Sun Sep-Jun) This reputable restaurant-cum-wine-bar overlooking the Vieux Port will tempt the gourmand in you with dishes such as organic Corsican veal or *tartare de liche* (raw leerfish). Since wines also feature highly here, let things rip with the list of well-chosen Corsican tipples (from €3.10).



Drinking

Place St-Nicolas and the backstreets around the Vieux Port are the places to head to when it comes to sampling a cold Pietra (locally brewed amber beer, whose ingredients include chestnut flour from the Castagniccia region).



Shopping

Bastia has a smattering of tempting shops selling quality local delicacies. Drop by the iconic **LN Mattei** (www.capcorsemattei.com; 15 bd Général de Gaulle), which is housed in a gloriously retro building, **U Paese** (www.

u-paese.com; 4 rue Napoléon) and **Santa Catalina** (8 rue des Terrasses).



Information

Tourist office (www.bastia-tourisme.com; place St-Nicolas; ☎8.30am-8pm Apr-Sep) Multilingual tourist office.



Getting There & Away

AIR Aéroport Bastia-Poretta (www.bastia.aeroport.fr) is 24km south of the city. Buses (€8.50, 30 minutes, 10 daily) depart from outside the Préfecture building. Timetables are posted at the bus stop and are available at the tourist office. A taxi will set you back €40/55 during the day/night with **Taxis Bleus** (☎04 95 32 70 70).

BOAT Bastia has two ferry terminals. All the ferry companies have information offices in the southern terminal, which usually opens for same-day ticket sales a couple of hours before each sailing. Ferry services head to/from Marseille, Toulon and Nice on mainland France, and Livorno, Savona, Piombino and Genoa in Italy, see p873 for more. Corsica Ferries, Moby Lines and La Mériidionale have offices nearby.

Corsica Ferries (www.corsicaferries.com; 15bis rue Chanoine Leschi) Opposite the northern terminal.

La Mériidionale (www.lameridionale.fr)

Moby Lines (www.moby.it; 4 rue du Commandant Luce de Casabianca)

SNCM (www.sncm.fr; inside southern terminal)

BUS As well as the 'bus station' (actually a car park) north of place St-Nicolas, there are several bus stops scattered around the centre. For buses to Cap Corse, see p876.

Autocars Cortenais (☎04 95 46 02 12) Travels to Corte (€11, two hours) once daily on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Buses leave from the train station.

Bastia

Top Sights

Citadel..... C7

Sights

- 1 Église Ste-Croix C7
- 2 Église Ste-Marie..... C7
- 3 Église St-Jean Baptiste..... C4
- Musée d'Ethnographie Corse (see 6)
- Oratoire de la Confrérie de la Ste-Croix (see 2)
- 4 Chapelle St-Roch..... C4
- 5 Chapelle de l'Immaculée Conception.. B4
- 6 Palais des Gouverneurs..... C6
- 7 Statue of Napoléon Bonaparte..... C3

Sleeping

- 8 Hôtel Central B3
- 9 Hôtel Les Voyageurs..... B1

Eating

- 10 A Casarella..... C7
- Chez Vincent (see 10)
- 11 Le Bouchon..... C5
- 12 Raugi C1

Shopping

- 13 LN Mattei C2
- 14 Santa Catalina B4
- 15 U Paese B4

Beaux Voyages (☎04 95 65 11 35) Buses to Île Rousse (€13, 90 minutes) and Calvi (€16, 2½ hours) run daily except Sunday. Buses leave from the train station.

Eurocorse (☎04 95 31 73 76) Buses to Ajaccio (€21, three hours) via Corte (€11.50, two hours) twice daily except on Sunday from Bastia's 'bus station'.

Les Rapides Bleus (☎04 95 31 03 79; 1 av Maréchal Sébastiani) Buses leave from in front the post office to Porto-Vecchio (€22, three hours) twice daily except Sundays and holidays.

TRAIN The train station (av Maréchal Sébastiani) is beside the large roundabout on place Maréchal Leclerc. Main destinations include Ajaccio (€25, 3¾ hours, four daily) via Corte (1¾ hours), and Calvi (three hours, three or four daily) via Île Rousse.

Cap Corse

Often described as 'an island within an island', Corsica's spiny northeastern peninsula, Cap Corse, stands out from the rest of Corsica. About 40km long and 10km wide, it resembles a giant geographical finger poked towards mainland France. What does it have on its menu? For starters, you can choose from a smattering of beguiling coastal fishing villages and small settlements perched precariously up in the hills. For main course, adjust your camera setting to 'panoramic' and shoot lovely images of enigmatic Genoese watchtowers dotted around the coastline. And for desert there's an array of jagged coves and rocky cliffs. Be prepared for some adventurous driving; although the peninsula is only 40km long, the narrow road that rounds its coast crams in 120km of switchback curves and breathtaking drops into the sea, especially along the west coast.

i Getting There & Away

The main road around Cap Corse is the D80.

Société des Transports Interurbains Bastiais runs several daily buses to Cap Corse from Bastia, with destinations including Erbalunga and Pietracorbara. **Transports Miguelli** runs to Macinaggio (€7, two daily Monday to Saturday). Buses leave from outside the Bastia tourist office.

ERBALUNGA

From Bastia, the coast unfolds through seaside resorts and small beaches towards the quaint harbour of Erbalunga, 9km north. Wander down to the tiny village square and quayside, which has a cluster of cute

cafés and restaurants. Narrow alleys lead through shady courtyards to the **tower**. Each August, the **Festival d'Erbalunga** promotes open-air concerts in the village's central square.

The stylish and welcoming **Hôtel De-meure Castel Brando** (☎04 95 30 10 30; www.castelbrando.com; rte Principale; d €115-225; ☼☼☼) is set in a mid-19th-century mansion surrounded by palm-shaded gardens and three modern annexes that house even more luxurious accommodation. Reason itself to visit Erbalunga is **Le Pirate** (☎04 95 33 24 20; harbour; menus €35-90; ☼Mar-Dec, closed Mon & Tue low season), an award-winning restaurant with a lovely terrace overlooking the harbour – magical on starry summer evenings. Its contemporary cuisine is creative and refined.

MACINAGGIO

The hub of the eastern cape, Macinaggio has a pleasant little harbour that offers the island's best moorings. It also has the cape's sole **tourist office** (www.ot-rogliano-macinaggio.com; port de Plaisance; ☎9am-noon & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat).

With a range of activities, the town makes a good base for exploring the northern reaches of the promontory. In summer, the **San Paulu** (☎04 95 35 07 09; www.sanpaulu.com; port de Plaisance; ☼) which docks opposite the tourist office, cruises along the stunning coastline to the remote village of **Barcaggio** and back (round trip €23, two hours). The return trip takes a turn around the nature reserve of the **Îles Finocchiarola**, an important breeding site for seabirds.

Hikers will love the **Sentiers des Douaniers** (Customs Officers' Trail), a rugged coastal path that leads to Barcaggio, passing two Genoese towers.

Macinaggio is not bereft of accommodation options, but if you're after a charming B&B, it's worth taking a detour inland to the village of **Rogliano**, about 4km from Macinaggio, where you'll find **U Sant'Agnellu** (☎04 95 35 40 59; www.hotel-usantagnellu.com; d incl breakfast €90-160; ☼May-mid-Oct; ☼). This beautifully restored villa is located opposite the church in the centre of the village. Be sure to book one of the seven rooms that face the sea.

CENTURI

Crayfish, anyone? The tiny, boat-crammed harbour of Centuri is not only the most picturesque in Cap Corse, it's also home to

the most important crayfish fleet on the island. Now's your chance to savour a seafood feast in one of the numerous eateries on the quayside. The *pâtes à la langouste* (crayfish with pasta) served at **Au Vieux Moulin** (☎04 95 35 60 15; mains €17-45, menus €15-60; ☺May-Oct) will linger long on the palate. **A Macciotta** (☎04 95 35 64 12; mains €13-35; ☺May-Oct) is another well-regarded option specialising in seafood.

If you're after a good-value hotel in the heart of Centuri, you won't do better than **L'Auberge du Pêcheur** (☎04 95 35 60 14; d €60-75; ☺Apr-Oct), which has only five doubles. They're simple but fresh and trim. For serious cossetting, head to Au Vieux Moulin (doubles €110 to €220).

NONZA

Clinging to the flanks of a rocky pinnacle topped with a stone tower and overlooking a black-sand beach, the village of Nonza is easily the most attractive on the cape's western coast. With its jumble of schist-roofed stone houses looking ready to tumble down the steep hillside, it fits the picture-postcard ideal. Make a beeline for the red-and-yellow 16th-century **Église Ste-Julie**, with a polychrom marble altar created in Florence in 1693, and the massive **Tour de Nonza** (Nonza Watchtower).



Sleeping & Eating

Chambre d'hôte Le Relais du Cap B&B € (☎04 95 37 86 53; www.relaisducap.com; Marine de Negru; d with shared bathroom €60-80; ☺Apr-Oct; ☹) For the ultimate seaside escape, this is hard to beat. Tucked improbably between a towering cliff and a pocket-sized pebble beach, this pert little B&B features four unpretentious yet neat doubles, all offering staggering sunset-facing sea views. No air-con here – but who needs it with the sea breezes puffing in? The copious breakfast served on a terrace overlooking the sea is another draw. It's 4km south of Nonza.

Chambre d'hôte Casa Maria B&B €€ (☎04 95 37 80 95; www.casamaria.fr; d €75-95; ☹☹) A bewitching little hideaway in the heart of the village, this B&B occupies a coolly refurbished 18th-century mansion. Four of its five rooms have sea views, and three sit harmoniously beneath the sloping roof.

A Sassa RESTAURANT € (☎06 11 99 49 03; mains €12-24; ☹☹lunch May-Oct, dinner Jul-Aug) Feeling peckish? A Sassa,

nestled among the rock outcrops below the tower, is a wonderful option, with a scatter of rickety tables and benches on a clifftop terrace. It majors on grilled meat, pasta and salads.

LA BALAGNE

If you could visit only one region after the sensational Golfe de Porto, it would have to be La Balagne. This region has a blend of history, culture and beach all rolled into one, with a dash of Mediterranean glam sealing the deal. Refine your art of sampling *la dolce vita* in Calvi and Île Rousse before venturing inland in search of that picture-postcard perfect village.

Île Rousse (Isula Rossa)

POP 3000

Sun-worshippers, celebrities and holidaying yachties all buzz around the busy beach town of Île Rousse, straddling a long, sandy curve of land backed by maquis-cloaked mountains and a sparkling beach. Originally founded by Pascal Paoli in 1758 as a rival port to pro-Genoese Calvi, the town was later renamed after the russet-coloured rock of Île de la Pietra offshore (now home to the town's ferry port and lighthouse).

Sights

Old Town

HISTORIC QUARTER

Delve into the alleyways of the town centre and soak up the atmosphere. Surprise: constructed around 1850, the covered **food market** (place Paoli; ☺8am-1pm), with its 21 classical columns, resembles a Greek temple. It abuts the tree-shaded **place Paoli**, Île-Rousse's central square, where you can watch nightly boules contests courtesy of the local gents while you sip an apéritif on the terrace of venerable **Café des Platanes** – it can't get more Île Rousse than that.

Promenade a Marinella

SEAFRONT & BEACHES

Île Rousse's sandy beaches stretch along the seafront, known as Promenade a Marinella, for 3km east of town. It's not a bad idea, though, to head to less crowded beaches around Île Rousse, including **plage de Bodri**, immediately southwest of town, **Algajola**, 7km to the west, or the magnificent **plage de Lozari**, about 6km to the east. They're accessible via the clanking Tramway de la Balagne.

Île de la Pietra

For an easy stroll, head over the short umbilical causeway that links rocky **Île de la Pietra** to the mainland, past a small **Genoese watchtower** and up to the **light-house**, from where there's a spectacular seascape. **Club Nautique d'Île Rousse** (www.cnir.org; rte du Port) organises gentle two-hour sea-kayak trips (€30) around the promontory and its offshore islets.

Parc de Saleccia

PROMONTORY BOTANICAL GARDENS

(☎04 95 36 88 83; www.parc-saleccia.fr; rte de Bastia; adult/child €7/5; ☀10am-8pm) Wander the 7 hectares of these landscaped gardens to explore the flora of Corsica – the tough plants of the maquis, pines, myrtles, fig trees and over 100 varieties of olive trees. The gardens are 4.5km from town on the Bastia road; hours are shorter outside summer.



Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Cala di L'Oru

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 60 14 75; www.hotel-caladiloru.com; bd Pierre Pasquini; s €74-114, d €78-166; ☀Mar-Oct; 🍷🍷🍷) This peaceful option sporting 26 rooms is run by a family of artists, and it shows: paintings and photos in the public areas are by the owners' sons. The flowery garden is a good place to mooch around and soak up the tranquil charm, or you can relax in the stress-melting pool.

Hôtel-Restaurant Le Grillon

HOTEL €

(☎04 95 60 00 49; www.hotel-grillon.net; 10 av Paul Doumer; d €52-62; ☀Apr-Oct; 🍷🍷) The most obvious choice if you're counting the pennies, Le Grillon has well-kept, space-efficient rooms with straightforward decor and neat bathrooms, as well as a popular ground-floor restaurant.

Hôtel Perla Rossa

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€

(☎04 95 48 45 30; www.hotelperlarossa.com; 30 rue Notre-Dame; ste from €260; ☀Mar-Oct; 🍷🍷🍷) This refined cocoon smack dab in the centre adds a touch of glam to the local hotel scene, with artfully designed and sensitively furnished rooms.

Restaurant Pasquale Paoli

GASTRONOMIC CORSICAN €€€

(☎04 95 47 67 70; 2 place Paoli; mains €15-39, menus €45-80; ☀dinner daily Jul-Aug, lunch & dinner Mon, Tue, Thu-Sat, lunch Sun Sep-Jun) Île Rousse's choicest restaurant has been awarded one Michelin star, and you'll certainly enjoy a sophisticated dining experience inside the whitewashed, vaulted

dining room. Expect innovative fare made from the island's best ingredients. There's also a terrace overlooking place Paoli, from where you can see the town's nightly boules contests.

U Spuntinu

CORSICAN €€

(☎04 95 60 00 05; 1 rue Napoléon; mains €15-22, menus €22-26; ☀lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) This venue right in the centre boasts a happy buzz at lunchtime and whips up lip-smacking Corsican meals. Try the *assiette Corse* (Corsican platter; €21.50) which features a selection of island favourites.

U Libecciu

SEAFOOD €€

(☎04 95 60 13 82; rue Notre-Dame; mains €12-32; ☀Apr-Oct) A short hop from the market, this restaurant serves up the town's best seafood, including steaming mussels prepared in different ways (try them with the house Cap Corse sauce).



Information

Tourist office (www.balagne-corsica.com; place Paoli; ☀9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) Shorter hours outside summer.



Getting There & Away

BOAT Ferries run to/from Nice, Marseille and Toulon (France) and Savona (Italy). For more, see p873

BUS Les Beaux Voyages (☎04 95 65 11 35) runs buses between Calvi and Bastia that pass through Île Rousse. The service runs from Monday to Saturday year-round.

TRAIN There are two departures daily to Bastia (2½ hours) and Ajaccio (four hours), each requiring a change in Ponte Leccia.

Calvi

POP 5600

Basking between the fiery orange bastions of its 15th-century citadel and the glittering waters of a moon-shaped bay, Calvi feels closer to the chi-chi sophistication of a Côte d'Azur resort than a historic Corsican port. Palatial yachts and private cruisers jostle for space along its harbourside, lined with upmarket brasseries and cafés, while high above the quay the watchtowers and battlements of the town's Genoese stronghold stand guard, proffering sweeping views inland to Monte Cinto (2706m). Unsurprisingly, Calvi is one of Corsica's most popular tourist spots and in summer it's crammed to bursting – pitch up in the shoulder sea-

LA BALAGNE INTERIOR

What a difference a few miles can make! If you need an escape from the hullaballo of the coastal fleshpots, grab the steering wheel, jump on a serpentine country road and explore inland Balagne. In the countless valleys and spurs that slice up the spectacular scenery are scattered cute-as-can-be hilltop villages, Romanesque chapels, olive groves and lush vineyards. The Balagne hinterland is also a source of inspiration for many artisans. A signposted route, the **Strada di L'Artigiani** (rte des Artisans; www.routedesartisans.fr), links up the region's most attractive villages, and details local workshops. You can pick up a route map from the tourist offices in Calvi and Île Rousse. Of particular interest is the craft centre of **Pigna**, 7km from Île Rousse (follow the D151), where dotted around the cobbled streets you'll find makers of everything from candles to lutes and music boxes. South of Pigna (continue along the D151), the uber-cute village of **Sant'Antonino**, precariously perched on a rocky outcrop (views!), is well worth a gander, as is **Feliceto**, famous for its great AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) wines. The D71 (and then the D63) will take you to **Olimi-Cappella**, from which you can head to **Belgodère**, another adorable village.

Should you fall in love with the area, you'll find a smattering of atmospheric options. In Pigna, **Casa Musicale** (☎04 95 61 77 31; www.casa-musicale.org; d €70-110, mains €11-24) has quirky rooms finished with painted frescos and fabulous valley views, while **Hôtel U Palazzu** (☎04 95 47 32 78; www.hotel-corse-palazzu.com; d from €140, ste from €240; ☺Apr-Oct) offers plush rooms in an 18th-century mansion. In Olmi-Cappella, **Chambre d'hôte U Chiosu di a Pietra** (☎04 95 61 91 01; d €70-82) is a bucolic retreat with four oh-so-inviting rooms.

sons, when you'll be able to stroll the citadel's cobbled alleys in relative peace and quiet.

Sights & Activities

Citadel

HISTORIC NEIGHBOURHOOD

Set atop a lofty promontory, Calvi's massive fortified citadel offers superb wraparound views of the town and the bay at almost every turn. Built by the town's Genoese governors, Calvi's citadel has seen off several major assaults down the centuries, fending off everyone from Franco-Turkish raiders to Anglo-Corsican armies. Inside the battlements, don't miss the well-proportioned **Caserne Sampiero** (place d'Armes), which was the seat of power for the Genoese administration, and the 13th-century **cathédrale St-Jean Baptiste**; its most celebrated relic is the ebony *Christ des Miracles*, credited with saving the town from Saracen invasion in 1553.

The citadel has five **bastions**, each offering wonderful seascapes.

Pointe de la Revellata

WALK

A two-hour (round-trip) walk along a well-defined track brings you to the nearest Corsican point to the French mainland, home to a **lighthouse** and a gorgeous view of Cal-

vi and the spiky mountains of La Balagne. It's 4km west of Calvi.

Water Sports

Sunworshippers don't have far to stroll – Calvi's stellar 4km **beach** begins at the marina and runs east around the Golfe de Calvi. If you fancy something more strenuous than pressing a beach towel, you can rent out **kayaks** and **windsurfers** from the **Calvi Nautique Club** (www.calvinc.org; Base Nautique, port de Plaisance; ☺May-Oct). There are also excellent **diving** and **snorkelling** options near the Pointe de la Revellata. Reputable dive centres include **Calvi Plongée Citadelle** (www.calviplongee2b.com; quai Landry) and **EPIC** (<http://perso.orange.fr/epiccalvi/plongee>; quai Landry; ☎), both at the harbour.



Festivals & Events

La Semaine Sainte

EASTER FESTIVAL

Easter festival, culminating in street processions on Good Friday.

Calvi Jazz festival

JAZZ FESTIVAL

Corsica's biggest jazz festival, in late June.

Rencontres Polyphoniques

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Traditional Corsican chants can be heard at this five-day music festival in September.

Festiventu

WIND FESTIVAL

Held in late October, this festival celebrates the role of wind with hundreds of kites on the beach.



Sleeping

Hôtel La Villa

HOTEL €€€

(02 04 95 65 10 10; www.hotel-lavilla.com; d from €400; ☺Apr-Jan; ☼☼☼) If you want to do Calvi in style, head straight for this lavish hilltop hideaway, brimming with boutique trappings. Clean lines, cappuccino-and-chocolate colour schemes, designer fabrics and minimalist motifs distinguish the rooms, while the exterior facilities include spas, tennis courts, a Michelin-starred restaurant and one of the most fabulous infinity pools you could ever hope to see.

Hôtel Belvedere

HOTEL €€

(02 04 95 65 01 25; www.resa-hotels-calvi.com; place Christophe Colomb; d €70-120; ☼☼) With a top-of-the-town position striking distance from the citadel and 24 comfortable yet smallish rooms, the Belvedere won't disappoint. The rooms on the 3rd floor boast top-notch views of the Golfe de Calvi.

Hôtel du Centre

HOTEL €

(02 04 95 65 02 01; 14 rue Alsace Lorraine; d with shared bathroom €32-47; ☺Jun-Sep) Not the most charming choice – furnishings are seriously dated – but at this price and in such a brilliant location it would be churlish to quibble. The most expensive rooms have a shower.

Other options:

Camping La Pinède

CAMPGROUND €

(02 04 95 65 17 80; www.camping-calvi.com; rte de la Pinède; adult/tent/car €9/5/3.50; ☺Apr-Oct; ☼☼) Handy for Calvi town and the beach.

Hôtel Christophe Colomb

HOTEL €€

(02 04 95 65 06 04; www.hotelchristophecolomb.com; place Bel Ombra; d €85-120; ☼☼) A reasonably priced option within striking distance of the citadel. Mediterranean colourwashes keep things jolly in the rooms.

Hôtel Le Magnolia

HOTEL €€

(02 04 95 65 19 16; www.hotel-le-magnolia.com; rue Alsace Lorraine; d €95-140; ☼☼) An oasis from the harbourside fizz, set behind a walled courtyard and a handsome magnolia tree.



Eating

Calvi's quayside is chock-a-bloc with restaurants, but many focus more on the ocean ambience than on the quality of the food.

Emile's

GASTRONOMIC €€€

(02 04 95 65 09 60; quai Landry; mains €38-46, menu €50; ☺Apr-Oct) Yes, the set *menu* has the potential to flag a red alert to Amex, but it's the top-end darling of central Calvi. From the scenic 1st-floor terrace overlooking the quayside, it provides a memorable dining experience with unobtrusive service and fabulous food. If you've never had the chance to try grilled lobster, this is *the* place to do it, washed down with an ice-cold bottle of white.

U Fornu

MODERN CORSICAN €€

(02 04 95 65 27 60; www.ufornu.com; bd Wilson; mains €18-25, menu €18; ☺Apr-Oct) A surprisingly hip restaurant inside a restored stately house, this cool culinary outpost specialises in creative dishes that stray off the familiar Corsican path. Dishes are elegantly presented and filled with subtle flavours, and the *menu Corse* is excellent value. Eat in the sassy grey and red interior, or on the shady terrace. U Fornu is smack dab in the centre, but tucked away in a quiet cul-de-sac off the main thoroughfare.

Le Tire-Bouchon

BISTRO €€

(02 04 95 65 24 41; rue Clémenceau; mains €12-20, menu €19; ☺April-Oct, closed Wed Apr, May & Oct) This buzzy option, as much wine bar as restaurant, is a gourmand's playground. Perch yourself on the balcony overlooking the crowds milling on rue Clémenceau, then order from the dishes of the day, posted on a chalkboard. Be good to yourself with veal stew, tagliatelle with Brocciu (fresh ewe's or goat's cheese), a cheese platter and luscious local tipples.

A Scola

TEA HOUSE €

(02 04 95 65 07 09; Citadel; mains €10-18, menu €18; ☺Mar-Oct, 10am-7pm summer) If you think life is unbearable without a home-made pastry (mmm, the melt-in-the-mouth chocolate cake), bookmark this little tea house opposite the cathedral door. It's also ideal for a refreshing cup or a quick and affordable sit-down lunch as you explore the citadel. The tables at the back have jaw-dropping views of the bay.

U Callelu

SEAFOOD €€

(02 04 95 65 22 18; quai Landry; mains €16-29, menu €24; ☺Mar-Oct, closed Mon except Jul-Aug) The *menu* chases the changing seasons at this homespun eatery, run with passion and flair by a born-and-bred islander who tracks down the best local ingredients for his dishes: meat and veg from the mar-

ket, wine direct from the vineyards, fish straight off the boats. It's on the quayside.

La Voûte

TRADITIONAL CORSICAN €

(☎06 22 14 40 87; 2 rue St-Antoine, Citadel; mains €10-20; ☺closed Sun in winter) This simple eatery set in a vaulted room cooks up robust Corsican classics such as lasagne with wild boar, pasta with Brocciu and veal stew.



Drinking

There are plenty of places around town at which to whet your whistle. The best buzz can be found on the quayside.

Chez Tao

MUSIC BAR

(rue St-Antoine; ☺Jun-Sep) Within the citadel, Chez Tao is an institution. This super-smooth piano bar occupying a lavishly decorated vaulted room was founded in 1935 by Tao Kanbey de Kerékoff, a White Russian émigré, and it still attracts hedonistic hipsters seven decades later.

Le Havanita

COCKTAIL BAR

(quai Landry; ☺Apr-Sep) Kick off the night with a few mojitos at this cheerful den on the quayside.

A Cantina

WINE BAR

(10 rue Joffre; ☺Apr-Oct) Treat yourself to a taste of the finest Calvi AOC wine at this supercool tapas and wine bar on the quayside.



Information

Tourist office (☎04 95 65 16 67; www.balagne-corsica.com; Port de Plaisance; ☺9am-noon & 3-6.30pm daily Jul & Aug, closed Sun May, Jun, Sep & Oct, closed Sat & Sun Nov-Apr)



Getting There & Away

AIR Seven kilometres southeast of town is **Aéroport Calvi Ste-Catherine** (www.calvi.aeroport.fr). There's no airport bus: a **taxi** (☎04 95 65 03 10) to and from town costs €20. See p892 for more information.

BOAT Calvi's ferry terminal is at the northeastern end of quai Landry, with regular ferries to/ from Nice (France) and Savona (Italy); see p873 for details. Ferry tickets can be bought from **CCR/Tramar** (☎04 95 65 01 38, 04 95 65 00 63; quai Landry) at the harbour.

BUS **Les Beaux Voyages** (☎04 95 65 11 35; place de la Porteuse d'Eau) runs one bus, Monday to Saturday year-round, from Calvi to Bastia (€16, 2½ hours) via Île Rousse. **Transports Ceccaldi** (☎04 95 22 41 99) runs a daily bus to Porto (€16, 2¾ hours) leaving from opposite the



BALAGNE TRAMWAY

The best way to access the numerous hidden coves and beaches that are sprinkled along the Balagne coastline is to take the Tramway de la Balagne. Not only is this dinky little train very convenient (no traffic jams!), but it also makes for an unforgettable journey beside getaway beaches. The *trinighellu* (trembler), as it's affectionately dubbed, trundles between Calvi and Île Rousse up to eight times daily between Easter and September, calling at 15 stations en route, all of which are request only. Hop off at an intermediate rocky cove or, for sand, leave the train at Algajola or Plage de Bodri, the last stop before Île Rousse. It costs €5.40 one way.

Super U supermarket in Calvi and the main road opposite the pharmacy in Porto. There's one bus daily from July to mid-September. From mid-May to June, and late September to May, there's no bus on Sunday.

TRAIN Calvi's train station is south of the harbour, near the tourist office. There are at least two departures daily to Bastia (three hours) and Ajaccio (five hours), each requiring a change in Ponte Leccia. From April to October, the Tramway de la Balagne clatters along the coast between Calvi and Île Rousse (€5.50, 45 minutes).

PORTO TO AJACCIO

Porto (Portu)

POP 2050

The setting couldn't be more grandiose. The crowning glory of the west coast, the seaside town of Porto sprawls at the base of a thickly forested valley trammelled on either side by crimson peaks. Buzzing in season and practically deserted in winter, it's a fantastic spot for exploring the shimmering seas around the Réserve Naturelle de Scandola, a Unesco-protected marine reservation, Les Calanques and the rugged interior.

The village is split by a promontory, topped by a restored Genoese square tower, erected in the 16th century to protect the gulf from Barbary incursions.

Sights

Porto's main sights are all dotted around the harbour. Once you've climbed the russet-coloured rocks up to the **Genoese tower** (€2.50; ☀9am-9pm Jul & Aug, 11am-7pm Sep-Jun), you can stroll round to the bustling marina, from where an arched footbridge crosses the estuary to a eucalyptus grove and Porto's pebbly patch of **beach**. Fish fanatics can drop by the **Aquarium de la Poudrière** (☎04 95 26 19 24; €5.50, joint ticket with Genoese Tower €6.50), which houses fishy specimens from around the Golfe de Porto.

Activities

Boat Trips

There's no vehicle access or footpath that leads into the magnificent, protected **Réserve Naturelle de Scandola**, so the only way to get up close is by sea. Between April and October, several companies based around Porto's marina sail to the base of its cliffs, often taking in Les Caniques and Girolata.

Expect to pay around €25 for trips to Les Caniques, or €40 for trips including Réserve Naturelle de Scandola and Girolata. Most offer informative commentaries (usually in French).

Diving & Snorkelling

Do you see the exceptional coastal wilderness of Golfe de Porto and the crags and cliffs that fret the skyline? It's more or less the same story below the waterline. This gulf boasts an exceptional diversity of underwater wonders, with a jaw-dropping topography – just as on land – and masses of fish due to the proximity of the Réserve Naturelle de Scandola.

Porto's three diving outfits, all based at the quay, offer introductory dives (from €45) and courses for beginners, as well as snorkelling trips (€15) to choice spots including the fringe of the Réserve Naturelle de Scandola.

Centre de Plongée du Golfe de Porto

(www.plongeeporto.com; marina; ☀Easter-Oct)

Génération Bleue

(www.generation-bleue.com; marina; ☀May-Oct)

Méditerranée Porto Sub

(www.plongeeecosse.fr; marina; ☀mid-Apr-Sep)

Hiking

The Porto area is a haven for hikers. The *Hikes & Walks in the Area of Porto* bro-

chure from the tourist office details 28 signed walks at all levels of difficulty. Hidden in the hills inland from Porto (follow the D124), the quintessentially Corsican villages of **Ota** and **Evisa** offer the best opportunities, within striking distance of **Gorges de Spelunca**, one of the deepest natural canyons on the island. A path runs along the steep sides of the Spelunca canyon beneath huge, humbling cliffs.

Sleeping

Le Colombo

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 26 10 14; www.hotelcolombo.com; rte de Calvi; d incl breakfast €67-110; ☀Apr-Oct; 🍷)

A smart place to rest your head, Le Colombo is built on three levels following the steep slope of the hillside. Most rooms are a soothing sky-blue with views of garden, sea and mountain, and corridors are adorned with striking images by local photographer Robert Candela. Mooch around the lovely small garden, shaded by a giant palm and overflowing with bougainvillea.

Le Maquis

HOTEL €

(☎04 95 26 12 19; www.hotel-lemaquis.com; cnr D214 & D81; d €48-110; ☀Apr-mid-Nov; 🍷)

Removed from the harbour hustle, the well-managed Le Maquis won't get you writing home but the rooms are discreetly decorated and comfortable, with quality mattresses and prim bathrooms (cheaper rooms have outside bathrooms). The plunging valley views are super, and another draw is the on-site restaurant.

Le Belvédère

HOTEL €

(☎04 95 26 12 01; www.hotel-le-belvedere.com; marina; d €55-125; ☀Apr-Oct; 🍷🍷🍷) With a regal setting overlooking the marina, the Belvédère offers modernised rooms with shiny bathrooms. For the full Porto experience, be sure to fork out for a room facing the bay – the other ones have obstructed views. The only downside is that there's no private car park.

Camping Les Oliviers

CAMPGROUND €

(☎04 95 26 14 49; www.camping-oliviers-porto.com; per person €7.50-10, tent €3-3.50; ☀late Mar-early Nov; 🍷🍷) Idyllically set among overhanging olive trees, this campsite's deluxe facilities include a gym, pizzeria and rock-surround swimming pool. It also rents wooden chalets (by the week).

Eating

Le Sud

MODERN CORSICAN €€

(☎04 95 26 14 11; marina; mains €16-27, menu €29; ☉Apr-Oct) Reasons for making your way here are threefold: to admire the views of the marina and the watchtower from the delightful vine-covered veranda; to sample the lip-smacking fish and meat dishes that grace the menu (what about veal with banana?); and to enjoy the relaxing atmosphere and lovely Mediterranean decor. For a little midday indulgence, tuck into its brimming *assiette repas*.

La Mer

SEAFOOD €€

(☎04 95 26 11 27; marina; mains €13-38, menus €19-29; ☉Apr-Oct) An oasis from the harbour-side fizz, La Mer has the finest views of all from its terrace overlooking the gulf and the Genoese tower. The fish on offer is determined by what's in the nets of the previous day's catch. Meat dishes also feature on the menu.

Le Maquis

TRADITIONAL CORSICAN €€

(☎04 95 26 12 19; cnr D214 & D81; mains €21-29, menus €22-34; ☉Apr-Oct) This character-filled eatery set in a granite house is held in high regard by locals and tourists alike. The food's a delight, with a tempting menu based on traditional Corsican cooking. There's a cosy all-wood interior but, for preference, reserve a table on the balcony, which has great views.

Information

Tourist office (www.porto-tourisme.com; place de la Marine; ☉9am-7pm, closed Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) Just behind the marina's upper car park.

Getting There & Around

Autocars Ceccaldi (☎04 95 22 41 99) operates buses from Porto to Ajaccio (€12, 2½ hours, two daily, no Sunday buses except from July to mid-September), stopping at Piana and Cargèse en route. For buses from Porto to Calvi, see p879).

Transports Mordiconi (☎04 95 48 00 44) bus company links Porto with Corte (€20, 2¾ hours) once daily except on Sunday from July to mid-September.

Piana

POP 500

Teetering above the Golfe de Porto and surrounded by the scarlet pillars of Les Calanques, Piana makes for a less frenzied

base than nearby Porto in the high season, and is a useful launching pad for exploring the idyllic beaches of **Ficajola** (4km from Piana) and **Arone** (11km southwest on the D824). The town's main landmark is the **Église Ste-Marie**, which is the focus for the annual Good Friday procession of **La Granitola**.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Scandola

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 27 80 07; www.hotelscandola.com; d €82-120; ☉☉) Don't be put off by the pinkish facade of this place, located uphill from the village on the left-hand side of the D81 as you drive towards Cargèse. It's a good port of call, with renovated rooms, professional service and million-dollar views of the coast.

Les Roches Rouges

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 27 81 81; www.lesrochesrouges.com; D81; d incl breakfast €114-135; ☉mid-Mar-mid-Nov; ☉) Corsica's original luxury hotel, built in 1912, is still one of the quirkiest places to stay on the island. It's on the right-hand side of the D81 as you drive from Porto, just before Piana. The rambling corridors and musty rooms are full of early-20th-century ambience, despite en suites, wi-fi and phone lines – you half expect Hercule Poirot to wander round the corner twiddling his moustache. Don't even consider cutting costs by not taking a sea-view room – you'll regret it. Even if you don't stay here, stop in for a drink or, even better, a meal at its superb gourmet restaurant (mains €21 to €34, menus €37 to €44) and savour the vista.

U Spuntinu

REGIONAL CUISINE €€

(☎04 95 27 80 02; mains €8-16, menu €19; ☉lunch & dinner summer, lunch low season) The fare at U Spuntinu, located just near Hôtel Scandola, is not gourmet but has a temptingly pronounced regional flavour. Among the winners are the *omelette au Brocciu* (omelette with Brocciu) and lamb rib.

Information

Tourist office (www.otpiana.com; place Mairie; ☉9am-6pm Mon-Fri) Next to the post office.

Getting There & Around

Buses between Porto and Ajaccio stop near the church and the post office.

Les Calanques

A trip to Les Calanques is an iconic Corsica experience. No amount of hyperbole could communicate the astonishing beauty of these sheer cliffs that rear up above the sea in teetering columns, towers and irregularly shaped boulders of pink, ochre and ginger. Flaming fiery red in the sunlight, the Calanques are one of Corsica's most photogenic sights. As you sway around switchback after switchback on the D81 between Porto and Piana, one breathtaking vista follows another. For the full technicolour experience, savour Les Calanques on foot. Several trails wind their way around these dramatic rock formations, many of which start near the Pont de Mezzanu, a road bridge about 3km from Piana along the D81. At the Piana tourist office, pick up the leaflet *Piana: Sentiers de Randonnée*, which details six walks within the area.

Cargèse (Cargjese)

POP 900

Surprise: with its whitewashed houses and sunbaked streets, Cargèse feels more like a Greek hilltop village than a Corsican harbour – this is hardly surprising, since the village was founded by refugee Greeks fleeing their Ottoman-controlled homeland in the 19th century.

Sights & Activities

The town is known for its **twin churches** – one Eastern (Orthodox), the other Western (Catholic) – that eye each other across vegetable plots, like boxers squaring up for a bout. The interior of the 19th-century Greek church contains original relics carried across by settlers from their Peloponnese homeland.

Boat trips sail to Scandola, Girolata and Les Calanques in summer.

One kilometre north of Cargèse is the small strip of **Plage de Pero**, overlooked by a couple of Genoese watchtowers, but for more space you'll need to push on south towards the popular **bay of Sagone**, about 10km further along the coastal D81.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Cynros

HOTEL €

(0204 95 26 49 47; www.torraccia.com; rue de la République; d €38-68; 🍷) The friendly Hôtel Cynros, a lemon-yellow town house in the heart of Cargèse, has nine sun-filled, good-

value rooms. The pick have dinky balconies teetering over the town's rooftops.

Motel Ta Kladia

MOTEL €€

(0204 95 26 40 73; www.motel-takladia.com; Plage de Pero; d €70-120; ☺Apr-Oct; 🍷) If you want to be within earshot of the sea, opt for this place on Pero beach. Rooms are comfortable but hardly fuel the imagination. Never mind. Not even the hardest of hearts can deny the location is perfect – this place is *les pieds dans l'eau* (right by the water).

A Volta

RESTAURANT €€

(0206 19 55 11 84; mains €14-25; ☺summer) With a magical setting overlooking the Med, snazzy A Volta has fresh-as-it-gets salads, inventive pastas and well-prepared meat and fish dishes, as well as a long, tantalising list of ice creams and sorbets.

Information

Tourist office (www.cargese.net; rue du Docteur Dragacci; ☺9am-7pm, closed Sun Oct-May) A little way north of the churches.

Getting There & Around

Two daily buses from Ota (1½ hours) via Porto (one hour) to Ajaccio (one hour) stop in front of the post office. There are no buses on Sunday except in July and August.

Ajaccio (Aiacciu)

POP 52,880

Ajaccio is all class – and seduction. Commanding a lovely sweep of bay, the city breathes confidence and has more than a whiff of the Côte d'Azur. Everyone from solo travellers to romance-seeking couples and families will love moseying around the centre, replete with mellow-toned buildings and buzzing cafés – not to mention its large marina and the trendy *rte des Sanguinaires* area, a few kilometres to the west.

The spectre of Corsica's general looms over Ajaccio. Napoléon Bonaparte was born here in 1769, and the city is dotted with sites relating to the diminutive dictator, from his childhood home to seafront statues, museums and countless street names.

Sights

Musée National de la Maison Bonaparte

MUSEUM

(0204 95 21 43 89; rue St-Charles; adult/concession €5/3.50; ☺9-11.30am & 2-5.30pm) Napoléon spent his first nine years in this house. Ransacked by Corsican nationalists

in 1793, requisitioned by English troops from 1794 to 1796, and eventually rebuilt by Napoléon's mother, the house became a place of pilgrimage for French revolutionaries, and visitors are still encouraged to observe suitably hushed tones. It hosts memorabilia of the emperor and his siblings, in-

cluding a glass medallion containing a lock of his hair. It's closed Monday mornings.

Palais Fesch – Musée des Beaux-Arts

MUSEUM

(☎04 95 21 48 17; www.musee-fesch.com; 50-52 rue du Cardinal Fesch; adult/child €8/5;

Ajaccio (Aiacciu)



Ajaccio

Top Sights

Palais Fesch – Musée des Beaux-Arts.....	C1
Musée National de la Maison Bonaparte.....	C4

Sights

- 1 Cathédrale Ste-Marie.....C4
- 2 Chapelle Impériale.....C1
- 3 Musée a Bandera.....A3
- 4 Salon Napoléonien.....C3

Activities, Courses & Tours

- 5 Découvertes Naturelles.....D3
- Nave Va.....(see 5)

Eating

- 6 Da Mamma.....C2
- 7 Le 20123.....B4
- 8 Le Bilboq – Chez Jean Jean.....C4
- 9 Le Grand Café Napoléon.....B3
- 10 Le Spago.....B4
- 11 L'Estaminet.....C4
- 12 U Pampasgiolu.....C4

Shopping

- 13 Boulangerie Galeani.....C3
- 14 U Stazzu.....C4

☉10.30am-5pm Mon, Wed & Sat, noon-5pm Thu, Fri & Sun) One of the island's must-sees, this superb museum reopened in 2010 after extensive renovation works. Established by Napoléon's uncle, it has France's largest collection of Italian paintings outside the Louvre. Mostly the works of minor or anonymous 14th- to 19th-century artists, there are also canvases by Titian, Fra Bartolomeo, Veronese, Botticelli and Bellini. Look out for *La Vierge à l'Enfant Soutenu par un Ange* (Mother and Child Supported by an Angel), one of Botticelli's masterpieces. *Portrait de l'Homme au Gant* (Portrait of the Gloved Man) by Titian matches another in the Louvre. The museum also houses temporary exhibitions. Within the **Chapelle Impériale** (Imperial Chapel), constructed in 1860, several members of the imperial family lie entombed in the crypt. But don't expect to find Napoleon's own remains here – he's buried in Les Invalides in Paris.

Salon Napoléonien

MUSEUM

(☎04 95 21 90 15; www.musee-fesch.com; place Foch; adult/child €2.30/1.50; ☉9-11.45am & 2-5.45pm Mon-Fri) Fans of Napoléon will make a beeline for this museum on the 1st

floor of the Hôtel de Ville. It exhibits Napoléonic medals, portraits and busts, as well as a fabulously frescoed ceiling of Napoléon and entourage.

Musée a Bandera

MUSEUM

(☎04 95 51 07 34; 1 rue du Général Lévie; admission €4; ☉9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) Tucked away on a little side street, this quirky little museum explores Corsican history up to WWII. Among the highlights are a diorama of the 1769 battle of Ponte Novo that confirmed French conquest of the island, a model of the port of Ajaccio as it was in the same period, and a proclamation by Gilbert Elliot, viceroy of the shortlived Anglo-Corsican kingdom (1794-96). There are also a few worthy panels describing the role of women in Corsican society.

Cathédrale Ste-Marie

CATHEDRAL

(rue Forcioli Conti) The 16th-century cathedral contains Napoléon's baptismal font and the *Vierge au Sacré-Cœur* (Virgin of the Sacred Heart) by Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863).

Citadel

FORTRESS

The 15th-century citadel, an imposing military fortress overlooking the sea that was a prison during WWII. It is normally off-limits to the general public, but the tourist office runs **guided tours** from June to September. Ask at the tourist office for the exact dates.

Beaches

After all that sightseeing, you may want to flake out on a beach. The town's most popular beach, Plage de Ricanto, popularly known as **Tahiti Plage**, is 5km east of town towards the airport, served by Bus 1. A series of small beaches west of Ajaccio (Ariane, Neptune, Palm Beach and Marinella) are served by Bus 5 from the town centre, terminating at the car park on Pointe de la Parata, 12km west of the city. From the point you'll have a grandstand view of the **Îles Sanguinaires** (Bloody Islands), so named because of their vivid crimson colours at sunset.

Beach bums will prefer the sands of **Porticcio**, 17km across the bay from Ajaccio, but be warned – in the high season the windbreaks pack them in sardine-tight, so look elsewhere if you're after seaside seclusion.

Découvertes Naturelles (www.decouvertes-naturelles.net) runs a summer ferry service (€5/8 single/return, 20 minutes) between Ajaccio and Porticcio.

NAPOLÉON, SON OF CORSICA?

Despite Ajaccio's endless Napoléonic connections, *le petit caporal's* attitude to his home island was rather ambivalent. Born to an Italian father and a Corsican mother, and largely educated in France (where he was mercilessly mocked for his provincial Corsican accent), Napoléon actually spent relatively little time on the island, and never returned following his coronation as Emperor of France in 1804. But there's no doubt that Napoléon's Corsican roots exerted a powerful hold on his imagination – famously, while exiled on Elba, he is said to have claimed he could recognise his homeland purely from the scent of the maquis.



Activities

Boat Trips

Two companies run boat trips around the Golfe d'Ajaccio and the Îles Sanguinaires (€27), and excursions to the Réserve Naturelle de Scandola (adult/child €50/35), departing daily from the quayside opposite place Foch.

Découvertes Naturelles (www.decouvertes-naturelles.net; ☺May-Sep; 📞) Also offers a sunset cruise to the Îles Sanguinaires (€27).

Nave Va (www.naveva.com; ☺May-Sep; 📞) Also offers a cultural tour (adult/child €28/20) and a voyage down to Bonifacio (€58/40), including a four-hour stop on shore.

Walking

The **Pointe de la Parata**, about 12km west of Ajaccio, is a magnet for walkers and photographers alike. From the car park, you'll find a short, much-trodden walking trail that leads around the promontory. A stroll along here rewards you with great sea views and tantalising close-ups of the four islets of the Îles Sanguinaires. Come here at sunset – the scenery is awesome.



Festivals & Events

Like many of Corsica's towns, Ajaccio has a line-up of annual festivities that adds some extra spice to the town's streets.

Festival de la St-Érasme

FESTIVAL

Fishy festival in honour of the patron saint of *pêcheurs* (fishermen), held around 2 June.

Fêtes Napoléoniennes

NAPOLÉON'S BIRTHDAY

Ajaccio's biggest bash celebrates Napoléon's birthday on 15 August, with military-themed parades, street spectacles and a huge fireworks display.

La relève de la Garde Impériale

CEREMONY

Every Thursday at 7pm in summer, you can watch the pomp and ceremony of the changing of the guard on place Foch in front of the town hall.



Sleeping

Hôtel Kallisté

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 51 34 45; www.hotel-kalliste-ajaccio.com; 51 cours Napoléon; s €67-77, d €85-105; 🍷🍷🍷) Exposed brick, neutral tones, terracotta tiles and a funky glass lift conjure a neo-boutique feel at the Kallisté, which occupies a typical 19th-century Ajaccio town house. Double-glazing keeps out the traffic hum from nearby cours Napoléon, and the facilities are fab – wi-fi, satellite TV and a copious buffet breakfast served in a spacious room. Unfortunately, the secret's out, so book ahead.

Hôtel Marengo

HOTEL €

(☎04 95 21 43 66; www.hotel-marengo.com; 2 rue Marengo; d €61-83; ☺Apr-Oct; 🍷) For something more personal, try this charmingly eccentric small hotel down a cul de sac off bd Madame Mère. Its 17 rooms all have a balcony, there's a quiet flower-filled courtyard and reception is an agreeable clutter of tasteful prints and personal objects. Oh, and it's just a stroll from the beach.

Hôtel du Palais

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 22 73 68; www.hoteldupalaisajaccio.com; 5 av Beverini Vico; s incl breakfast €70-75, d €80-85; 🍷🍷) Handy for the port, this venture is good value. Ignore the somewhat scruffy façade – inside the decor is embellished with contemporary colour schemes. The eight rooms won't win any design awards but they get the job done.



Eating

Tiny streetside restaurants cram the old quarter, and eating out there on a sultry summer night is an experience not to be missed.

Le Grand Café Napoléon MEDITERRANEAN €€
(☎04 95 21 42 54; 10-12 cours Napoléon; mains €23-30, menus €17-45) This one-of-a-kind Ajaccio institution scores a perfect 10 on our 'charm-meter' for its mind-blowing decor and refined cuisine. Push beyond the streetside terrace (itself rich in atmosphere) to the august belle époque former ballroom, with its tall mirrors, high ceilings, black-and-white terrazzo floors and soaring cream arches. Despite the classical surroundings, the menu is surprisingly modern, featuring elegantly presented fish and meat dishes. The weekday lunchtime *menu du marché* represents excellent value.

L'Altru Versu GASTRONOMIC €€
(☎04 95 50 05 22; rte des Sanguinaires, Les Sept Chapelles; mains €22-30, menus €32-40; ☎closed Mon Oct-May) Ajaccio's top-notch restaurant belongs to the Mezzacqui brothers (Jean-Pierre front of house, Pierre powering the kitchen), who are passionate gastronomes and excellent singers – they hitch on their guitars and serenade guests each Friday and Saturday night. Their creative cuisine sings in the mouth – what about pork with honey and clementine zests?

U Pampasgiolu TRADITIONAL CORSICA €€
(☎06 09 39 26 92; 15 rue de la Porta; mains €14-28; ☎dinner Mon-Sat) The rustic arch-vaulted dining room of this Ajaccio institution is packed with punters nearly every night of the week. They come for the first-rate Corsican food made from carefully chosen ingredients. Go à la carte, or choose from the *planche spuntinu* (snack selection) or *planche de la mer* (fish and seafood selection) for a great assortment of Corsican specialties served on wooden platters.

Le 20123 TRADITIONAL CORSICA €€
(☎04 95 21 50 05; www.20123.fr; 2 rue du Roi de Rome; menus €32; ☎dinner Tue-Sun) This one-of-a-kind place started life in the village of Pila Canale (postcode 20123 – get it?), and when the owner upped sticks to Ajaccio he decided to take the old village with him – water pump, washing line, life-sized dolls in traditional dress, central square et al. It all sounds a bit tacky, and it is (see the website) – but you won't find many more character-filled places in Corsica. Needless to say, the food is 100% authentic, too. There's just a single menu, presented orally.

Le Bilboq – Chez Jean Jean SEAFOOD €€€
(☎04 95 51 35 40; 1 rue du des Glacis; mains around €50; ☎dinner) In business for de-

cades, this Ajaccio icon is famous for one thing and one thing only: *langouste* (lobster), best enjoyed on the oh-so-cute little terrace in a pedestrian street. Knock it all down with a well-chosen Corsican wine, and you'll be in seventh heaven.

Da Mamma TRADITIONAL CORSICA €
(☎04 95 21 39 44; 3 passage Guinghetta; mains €12-25, menus €12-21; ☎lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner Mon) Staunchly Corsican cuisine aside, the main draw of this unfussy eatery is its location – it's tucked away down a steep alley and shaded by a magnificent rubber tree.

Other temptations:

Le Spago FUSION €
(☎04 95 21 15 71; rue Emmanuel Arène; mains €12-20; ☎lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) No Corsican speciality at this cool designer restaurant decked out in lime green – just salads and innovative dishes such as pork with apricots.

L'Estaminet MEDITERRANEAN €€
(☎04 95 50 10 42; 5 rue du Roi de Rome; mains €17-25, menus €19-25; ☎dinner Jun-Sep, dinner Mon, Sat & Sun, lunch Tue, lunch & dinner Thu & Fri Oct-May) An old-style brasserie decked out with shiny wood and polished brass, plus plenty of flavoursome dishes.

Shopping

For Corsican goodies, there's only one address that matters: **U Stazzu** (1 rue Bonaparte; ☎9am-12.30pm & 2.30-7pm), famous for its handmade charcuterie. It also sells the usual range of Corsican delicacies from other small producers. Sweet-lovers will lose all self-control at **Boulangerie Galeani** (3 rue du Cardinal Fesch; ☎7am-8pm Tue-Sat, 7am-1pm Sun) – see if you can resist the devilish *beignet de Brocciu* (Brocciu fritters) and *canistrelli* (biscuits made with almond, walnuts, lemon or aniseed) served at this longstanding bakery.

Drinking

Most of Ajaccio's action is along bd Lantiv, which has a good selection of atmospheric bars. Look around the chi-chi port Charles-Ornano, at the marina, too. In summer, the centre of pleasurable gravity shifts to the rte des Sanguinaires, which is lined with trendy *paillotes* (beachside venues) and discos.

i Information

Tourist office (www.ajaccio-tourisme.com; 3 bd du Roi Jérôme; ☎9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Jun-Sep, Mon-Fri Oct-May)

i Getting There & Away

AIR Aéroport d'Ajaccio-Campo dell'Oro (www.ajaccio.aeroport.fr) is 8km east of the city centre. Town Bus 8 (€4.50, 20 minutes) runs frequently between the airport and Ajaccio's bus station. A taxi costs around €25.

BOAT Boats depart from **Terminal Maritime et Routier** (quai l'Herminier), the combined bus/ferry terminal. Ferry services head to/from Toulon, Nice and Marseille on mainland France. See p873 for more.

Corsica Ferries (www.corsicaferries.com) Inside the terminal.

La Mériidionale (www.lameridionale.fr; bd Sampiero) Located inside the terminal.

SNCM (www.sncm.fr) The main office is on quai l'Herminier, and there's a ticket and information kiosk inside the terminal, which opens before most sailings.

BUS Lots of local bus companies have kiosks inside the terminal building. As always in Corsica, expect reduced services on Sunday and during the winter months. The bus-station information desk can supply timetables.

Autocars Ceccaldi (☎04 95 22 41 99) Travels to Porto (2½ hours, two daily, no Sunday buses except from July to mid-September) via Cargèse (one hour) and Piana (1½ hours).

Eurocorse (☎04 95 21 06 30) Travels to Bastia (three hours, two daily) via Corte (two hours). There's also a route to Bonifacio (four hours, two daily from Monday to Saturday, one on Sunday) via Sartène (two hours).

TRAIN From the **train station** (place de la Gare), services include Bastia (four hours, three to four daily), Corte (two hours, three to four daily) and Calvi (five hours, two daily; change at Ponte Leccia).

shady and scruffy, and life still crawls along at a traditional tilt. But it offers a much more convincing glimpse of how life was once lived in rural Corsica than do any of the island's more well-heeled towns. Notorious for its banditry and bloody vendettas in the 19th century, Sartène has more recently found fame thanks to the annual *Procession du Catenacciu*, a re-enactment of the Passion that takes place in the town every Good Friday.

👁 Sight & Activities

The only way to explore Sartène is on foot, and the town's corkscrew alleyways and shady staircases make an agreeable stroll on a blazing summer's afternoon. An archway through the **town hall** (formerly the Governors' Palace) leads to the residential **Santa Anna quarter**, where you'll find the town's most atmospheric streets.

Near the WWI memorial on place Porta is the granite **Église Ste-Marie**, which houses the 35kg cross and 17kg chain used in the annual **Procession du Catenacciu**. Since the Middle Ages, every Good Friday the Catenacciu ('chained one') has lugged this massive hunk of wood through town in a re-enactment of Christ's journey to Calvary. Barefoot, red-robed and cowed (to preserve his anonymity), the penitent is chosen by the parish priest to atone for a grave sin – in times gone by, legend has it that notorious bandits descended from the maquis to expiate their crimes.

Feel like seeing the area around Sartène from horseback instead of a car seat? **Do-mainne de Croccano** (www.corsenature.com; D148, rte de Granace) offers various horse-riding programs starting from €23 per hour. The *Promenade-Découverte du Sarténais* (three hours) is a lovely ramble amid the maquis, with special views over Sartène and the sea. It's 3.5km out of town on the road to Granace.

THE SOUTH

Sartène (Sartè)

POP 3500

With its grey granite houses, secretive cul-de-sac and slightly sombre, introspective air, Sartène has long been said to encapsulate Corsica's rugged spirit (French novelist Prosper Mérimée dubbed it the 'most Corsican of Corsican towns'). There's no doubt that Sartène feels a long way from the glitter of the Corsican coast; the hillside houses are endearingly ramshackle, the streets are

🏠 Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel San Damiano

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 70 55 41; www.sandamiano.fr; d €95-167; ☎Apr-Oct; 🍷🍷🍷) The San Damiano has everything in spades: a perfect location just staggering distance from the *vieille ville* (old town), sleek rooms with all mod cons, a soothing yellow colour scheme, million-dollar views over the Rizzanese valley and the mandatory sparkling swimming pool.

Hôtel-Restaurant des Roches HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 77 07 61; www.sartenehotel.fr; rue Jean Jaurès; s €60-91, d €70-105; 🍷🍷) The only venture in the centre of town, which means it's in high demand in summer. With a regal setting overlooking the valley and the Golfe du Valinco, it offers 60 modernised rooms with spotless bathrooms and air-conditioning. Nab a room with a view – the other ones look onto the parking lot. There's an attached restaurant.

Auberge Santa Barbara MODERN CORSICAN €€

(☎04 95 77 09 06; www.santabarbara.fr; mains €12-38, menu €36; 🍷Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) Send your tastebuds into a tailspin at this iconic restaurant serving authentic dishes with a creative twist. Award-winning chef Gisèle Lovichi is a true alchemist, with such delectable concoctions as pigeon with myrtle sauce or veal stew with tagliatelle. Another draw is the bucolic setting, with elegant tables set around a well-manicured flower garden. A respectable wine list completes the perfect picture. It's about 1.3km from the centre on the road to Propriano; follow the signs.

i Information

Tourist office (www.oti-sartenaisvalinco.com; cours Sœur Amélie; ☎9am-7pm)

i Getting There & Away

Sartène is on the twice-daily (one on Sunday) **Eurocorse** (☎04 95 21 06 30) bus line linking Ajaccio with Bonifacio.

Bonifacio (Bunifaziu) & Around

POP 2700

With its glittering harbour, creamy white cliffs and stout citadel teetering above the cornflower-blue waters of the Bouches de Bonifacio, this dazzling port is an essential stop on everyone's Corsican itinerary. Just a short hop from Sardinia, Bonifacio has a distinctly Italianate feel: sun-bleached townhouses, dangling washing lines and murky chapels cram the web of alleyways of the old citadel, while down below on the harbourside, brasseries and boat kiosks tout their wares to the droves of day-trippers. Bonifacio's also perfectly positioned for exploring the island's southerly beaches and the Îles Lavezzi.

i Sights**Citadel (Haute Ville)** HISTORIC NEIGHBOURHOOD

Much of Bonifacio's charm comes from strolling the citadel's shady streets, soaking up the architecture and the atmosphere.

PREHISTORIC CORSICA

Southern Corsica boasts the island's most astonishing prehistoric sites, which are must-sees for anyone with an interest in Corsica's ancient civilisations. Some time around 4000 BC to 3000 BC, Corsica developed its own megalithic faith (possibly imported by seafaring settlers from mainland Europe); most of the island's standing stones and menhirs date from this period. The most important site is **Filitosa** (☎04 95 74 00 91; www.filitosa.fr; admission €6; ☎8am-8pm Apr-Oct), northwest of Sartène, where a collection of extraordinary carved menhirs were discovered in 1946. The Filitosa menhirs are highly unusual: several have detailed faces, anatomical features (such as ribcages) and even swords and armour, suggesting that they may commemorate specific warriors or chieftains.

About 15km south of Sartène, the desolate and beautiful **Cauria** plateau is home to three megalithic curiosities: the *alignements* (lines) of **Stantari** and **Renaju** – several of which show similar anatomical details and weaponry to those of Filitosa – and the **Fontanaccia dolmen**, one of Corsica's few burial chambers, with its supporting pillars and capstones. Look out for the turn-off about 8km along the D48 towards Tizzano. What did these strange sites signify for their megalithic architects? Were they ritual temples? Sacred graveyards? Mythical armies? Or even celestial timepieces? Despite countless theories, no one has the foggiest idea.

Inland from Porto-Vecchio, the Alta Rocca region also musters up a handful of well-preserved megalithic remains. About 7km to the north of Levie, **Pianu di Levie** (adult/child €5.50/3; ☎9am-7pm) comprises two archaeological sites, the *castelli* (castles) of Cucuruzzu and Capula, connected by an interpretive trail. Archaeologists believe they were erected during the Bronze Age, around 1200 BC.

From the marina, the paved montée Rastello and montée St-Roch bring you to the citadel's old gateway, the **Porte de Gênes**, complete with its original 16th-century drawbridge. Inside the gateway is the 13th-century **Bastion de l'Étendard** (admission €2.50; ☀9am-7pm Apr-Oct), which houses a small historical museum exploring Bonifacio's past. Stroll the ramparts to **place du Marché** and **place de la Manichella**, which both offer jaw-dropping views over the Bouches de Bonifacio.

Several streets are spanned by arched aqueducts, which originally collected rainwater to fill the communal cistern opposite **Église Ste-Marie Majeure**. Look out for the wooden loggia outside the church: though heavily restored, it's one of the best examples of medieval carpentry in Corsica.

From the citadel, the **Escalier du Roi d'Aragon** (King of Aragon's stairway; admission €2.50; ☀9am-7pm Apr-Oct) cuts down the southern cliff-face. Its 187 steps were supposedly carved in a single night by Aragonese troops during the siege of 1420, although the troops were rebuffed by retaliating Bonifacio residents once they reached the top.

West along the limestone headland is the **Église Ste-Dominique** (admission €2.50; ☀9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat mid-Jun-mid-Sep), one of Corsica's few Gothic churches. It has reliquaries carried in processions through the town during a number of religious festivals.

Further to the west, you'll pass by a few windmills before reaching the eerily quiet marine **cemetery**, with its immaculate lines of tombs and imposing mausoleums, and the adjoining Église St-François. At the western tip of the peninsula, an underground passage dug by hand during WWII leads to the **Gouvernail de la Corse** (Rudder of Corsica; admission €2.50; ☀9am-6pm), a rock about a dozen metres from the shore with a shape reminiscent of the rudder of a ship.

Îles Lavezzi

ARCHIPELAGO

Paradise! Part of a protected area (known as La Réserve Naturelle des Bouches de Bonifacio), the Îles Lavezzi is a clutch of uninhabited islets that are made for those who love nothing better than splashing in tranquil lapis lazuli waters.

The 65-hectare Île Lavezzi, which gives its name to the whole archipelago, is the most accessible of the islands and the southernmost point of Corsica. The island's

savage beauty aside, its superb natural pools and scenic stretches of sand invite long sunbathing and swimming sessions. The island also has a cemetery for the victims who perished on board the *Sémillante*, a three-mast frigate that ran aground on Île Lavezzi in February 1855.

In summer, various companies organise **boat excursions** to the island; you can book at the ticket booths located on Bonifacio's marina. Boats are operated on a shuttle fashion, which allows you to linger on Île Lavezzi. You will need to bring your own lunch and drinks, as there is nowhere on the islands to buy anything. Trips to the Îles Lavezzi are also available from Porto-Vecchio.

Beaches

Bonifacio's town beaches are a little underwhelming. **Plage de Sotta Rocca** is a small pebbly cove below the citadel, reached by steps from av Charles de Gaulle, while **plage de la Catena** and **plage de l'Arinella** are sandy inlets on the northern side of Bouches de Bonifacio. On foot, follow the trail from av Sylvère Bohn, near the Esso petrol station.

For finer stretches of sand you'll need to head east along the D58 to the little cove of **Spérone**, opposite the islets of Cavallo and Lavezzi. Nearby **Piantarella** is popular with windsurfers, while further east is shingly **Calalonga**. There are several other lovely beaches around the **Golfe de Sant'Amanza**, 8km east of Bonifacio, including **Plage de Maora**.



Activities

Phare de Pertusato

WALK

If you're after that perfect picture, don't miss this fantastic, easy walk along the cliffs to Phare de Pertusato (Pertusato Lighthouse), from where the seamless views of the cliffs, the Îles Lavezzi, Bonifacio and Sardinia are memorable. The signposted starting point is just to the left of the sharp bend on the hill up to Bonifacio's citadel. Count on three hours (round trip).

Mérouville

DIVE SITE

The waters off Bonifacio offer plenty of scope for diving. The Îles Lavezzi (left) – the most popular diving area – feature a variety of sites for all levels. At Mérouville, Bonifacio's signature dive site, divers are guaranteed to get up close and personal with big groupers. Sign up with **Corsica**

Diving (www.corsicadiving.fr; quai Sennola), which is a well-established dive operator. A single dive starts at around €40.

Boat Trips

Don't leave Bonifacio without taking a **boat trip** around its extraordinary coastline, where you'll get the best perspective of the town's precarious position on top of the magnificent chalky cliffs. The one-hour itinerary (€19) includes the Goulet de Bonifacio, several *calanques* (deep rocky inlets) with clear aquamarine waters, a lighthouse, the Escalier du Roi d'Aragon and the Grotte du Sdragonato (Little Dragon Cave), a vast watery cave with a natural rooftop skylight.

Numerous companies vie for customers in summer; ticket booths are located on the marina. They all offer pretty much the same deal.



Sleeping

Hôtel des Étrangers

HOTEL €

(☎04 95 73 01 09; hoteldesetrangers.ifrance.com; av Sylvere Bohn; d €46-65; ☉Apr-mid-Oct; 🍷🍷) The Foreigners' Hotel is unspectacular, but it provides excellent value. Look at the rates! It's a solid, unfussy place offering spick-and-span rooms, all with tiled floors, clean bathrooms and simple colour schemes (more expensive ones have air-con). Yes, the main road outside's a bother, but for this price nobody's complaining. It's north of the harbour.

Hôtel Le Colomba

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 73 73 44; www.hotel-bonifacio-corse.fr; rue Simon Varsi; d €100-160; ☉Mar-Nov; 🍷🍷) Occupying a tastefully renovated 14th-century building, this beautiful hotel is a delightful address in a picturesque street, bang in the heart of the old town. Rooms are simple and smallish but fresh and pleasantly individual – wrought-iron bedsteads and country fabrics in some, carved bedheads and chequerboard tiles in others. Breakfast in a vaulted room is another highlight.

Domaine de Licetto

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 73 03 59, 04 95 73 19 48; www.licetto.com; rte du Phare; d €65-100; 🍷🍷) Located just a couple of kilometres east of Bonifacio yet light years away from the hustle and bustle of the coast, this is a very nice surprise. The seven rooms sport well-chosen tiles and modern furnishings, and feel fresh and comfortable. There's a well-regarded on-site restaurant.

Hotel Genovese

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 73 12 34; www.hotel-genovese.com; rte de Bonifacio; d €130-185; ☉Oct-Mar; 🍷🍷🍷) A breath of fresh air, this tasteful hotel is built on the ramparts. With its lovely swimming pool, stylish furniture and soothing tones, it's hard to resist. Try to score an outside-facing room, rather than a darker courtyard-facing one.

Camping l'Araguina

CAMPGROUND €

(☎04 95 73 02 96; www.camping-araguina-bonifacio.com; av Sylvere Bohn; per person/tent/car €6.60/2.70/2.70; ☉Mar-Oct) Bonifacio's main campsite is near the Hôtel des Étrangers, with plenty of tent sites and rental chalets, but the roadside location can be less than soothing.



Eating

Swish terrace restaurants pack the quayside, but the food isn't always as fancy as the ambience suggests.

Kissing Pigs

MODERN CORSICAN €€

(☎04 95 73 56 09; quai Banda del Ferro; mains €10-19, menus €13-20; ☉closed Wed & Sun low season) Soothingly positioned by the harbour, this widely acclaimed restaurant and wine bar serves savoury fare in a seductively cosy interior, complete with wooden fixtures and swinging sausages. It's famed for its cheese and charcuterie platters. For the indecisive, the *moitié-moitié* (half and half), which is a combination of the two, is the perfect answer. The wine list is another hit, with a good selection of Corsican tipplables, available by the glass.

Cantina Doria

CORSICAN €

(☎04 95 73 50 49; 27 rue Doria; mains €10-14; ☉Mon-Sat Apr-Sep) A Bonifacio institution, this cavernous little joint has a tantalising menu showcasing all the classics of Corsican cuisine, served in snug surrounds complete with wooden benches, copper pots, rustic tools and dented signs. Tuck into perennial favourites such as *lasagnes au fromage Corse* (lasagne with Corsican cheese) and *soupe Corse*, *aubergines à la bonifacienne* (aubergines stuffed with breadcrumbs and cheese), and you'll leave patting your tummy contentedly.

Domaine de Licetto

TRADITIONAL CORSICAN €€

(☎04 95 73 03 59; rte du Phare; menu €36; ☉dinner daily Aug, Mon-Sat Apr-Jul & Sep-mid-Oct.) If you're after an authentic Corsican experience, this place is hard to beat. Bring an empty tum: the five-course menu

is a culinary feast based on local ingredients that come directly from small-scale farmers. Menu stalwarts include suckling lamb and *aubergines à la bonifacienne*. It's right in the maquis, on the way to Phare de Pertusato.

Le Gregale

SEAFOOD €€

(☎04 95 73 51 46; Plage de Maora; fish €7 per 100g, lobster from €14 per 100g; ☺dinner Jun-Sep) On Plage de Maora, Le Gregale is well worth the detour. This is the place towards which all heads turn when it comes to tasting the freshest of fish. Depending on the daily catch, the menu may feature John Dory, sea bream, sea bass... and lobster. It's a family affair, with Mum, Dad (the cooks) and two sons (fishermen and waiters). Another draw is the rustic-chic setting, with blond-wood furniture and beams.

L'Archivoltò

MODERN CORSICAN €€

(☎04 95 73 17 58; rue de l'Archivoltò; mains €13-21; ☺dinner Jul-Aug, lunch Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep.) Steps from the Église Ste-Marie Majeure, this gloriously offbeat bistro feels like an antique shop, with an onslaught of quirky collectables from floor to ceiling. The chalked-up menu is just as eclectic, with an assortment of fish and meat dishes, as well as frondy salads. In summer the tables spill out onto the lovely piazzas outside.

i Information

There are only two ATMs in Bonifacio: at the post office (within the citadel) and at the Société Générale bank (at the marina).

Tourist office (www.bonifacio.fr; 2 rue Fred Scamaroni; ☺9am-8pm)

i Getting There & Away

AIR Figari-Sud Corse airport (www.figari.aeroport.fr) is about 21km north of Bonifacio. See p892 for further information. There's no public transport to/from the airport. A taxi costs about €40.

BOAT Sardinia's main ferry operators, **Saremar** (www.saremar.it) and **Moby Lines** (www.moby.it), offer services between Bonifacio and Santa Teresa di Gallura in summer. Costs vary according to the time and day of sailing, but range from around €10 to €19 one way plus taxes; the crossing lasts about an hour.

BUS Eurocorse (☎04 95 70 13 83) has two daily services (one on Sunday) between Bonifacio and Porto-Vecchio, Sartène, Propriano and Ajaccio in July and August. From September to June, it runs one daily service from Monday to

Saturday. For Bastia, you'll have to change in Porto-Vecchio.

Porto-Vecchio (Portivecchju) & Around

POP 10,600

Shamelessly seductive and fashionable, Porto-Vecchio is usually dubbed the Corsican St-Tropez, and it's no wonder. Sitting in a marvellous bay, it's the kind of place that lures French A-listers and wealthy tourists. The city has also a well-established party reputation during the season. Although there is no beach by the town proper, some of the island's best, and most famous, beaches are close by.

👁 Sights & Activities

Porto-Vecchio is fairly short on sights but the **Haute Ville**, with its picturesque backstreets lined with restaurant terraces and designer shops, has charm in spades. The atmospheric **rue Borgo** gives a glimpse of what the city was like in earlier days. The ruins of the old **Genoese citadel** are well worth a peek – you can't miss the **Porte Génoise** and the **Bastion de France** (closed to the public; you can admire from the outside).

Boat Trips

Various operators offer **boat excursions** to Îles Lavezzi (p889) and Bonifacio. The full-day excursion passes along the Réserve Naturelle des Îles Cerbicale and the beaches to the south of Porto-Vecchio. It costs €60/30 for adults/children and includes lunch.

Monte Cristo (www.croisieres-montecristo.com; ☺May-Sep; 📶) and **Ruscana** (www.amour-des-iles.com; ☺May-Sep; 📶) both have a booth at the marina.

Beaches

You didn't think we would forget beach lovers? When it comes to wishing for the archetypal 'idyllic beach', it's impossible to think past the immense **Plage de Palombaggia**. This is the Corsican paradise you've been daydreaming about: sparkling turquoise waters, long stretches of sand edged with pine trees and splendiferous views over the Îles Cerbicale. South of Plage de Palombaggia, **Plage de la Folacca** (also known as Plage de Tamaricciu) is no less impressive. Continue a few kilometres further south over a pass called Bocca di L'Oru and you'll come across another gem of a

beach, the gently curving **Plage de Santa Giulia**. From Porto-Vecchio, follow the N198 to the south and turn left onto rte de Palombaggia (it's signposted), which winds around the coast.

To the north, the coast is also sprinkled with scenic expanses of sand. The gorgeous, lucent depths of the beaches at **Cala Rossa** and **Baie de San Ciprianu** are sure to set your heart aflutter. Further to the north is the stunning **Golfe de Pinarello** with its Genoese tower and yet more beautiful expanses of sand lapped by shallow waters.



Sleeping



Chambre d'hôte A Littariccia

B&B €€

(☎04 95 70 41 33; www.littariccia.com; rte de Palombaggia; d €90-200; ☑) Find bucolic bliss at this attractive B&B that boasts a *faaabulous* location, in the hills overlooking Plage de Palombaggia. Your heart will lift at the dreamy views over the Med; your soul will find peace in the six button-cute rooms; and your body will relax in the small pool. Not all rooms come with a sea view, though.

Hôtel-Restaurant Le Goéland

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 70 14 15; www.hotelgoeland.com; La Marine; d incl half board €180-360; ☑Mar-Nov; ☑☑☑) Right on the seashore near the marina, this venture is all dolled up with a stylish lobby and crisp rooms (think soft sandy yellow and pastel tones, terracotta floors and dark furniture). After a day of turf pounding, plop into a sun-lounger and forget your hardships in the well-manicured garden complete with oleanders, pines and eucalypts. Be sure to ask for the '*vue mer*' (room with a sea view). There's an on-site restaurant.

Hôtel San Giovanni

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 70 22 25; www.hotel-san-giovanni.com; rte d'Arca; d €90-140; ☑Mar-Oct; ☑☑☑☑) San Giovanni's main draw? The 1.25-hectare landscaped gardens, with lots of flowers, ponds and palm trees, not to mention a lovely pool. Other perks include bike hire, jacuzzi and tennis court. By comparison, the rooms are a bit disappointing, with simple furnishings.



Eating

Tamaricciu

MODERN CORSICAN €€

(☎04 95 70 49 89; www.tamaricciu.com; rte de Palombaggia; mains €15-32; ☑lunch May, Jun & Sep, lunch & dinner Jul-Aug) Among the various *pail-*

lottes (beach restaurants) that are scattered along the beaches south of Porto-Vecchio, Tamaricciu has that special hip touch that makes it stand out. It specialises in the greats of Mediterranean cuisine: grilled fish (sea-bass, John Dory), meat dishes (lamb, beef) and pasta, all beautifully presented. The lunchtime menu also includes pizza served bubbling hot from the oven. It's at the southern tip of Plage de Palombaggia.

A Cantina di L'Orri

CORSICAN €

(☎04 95 70 26 21; cours Napoléon; mains €10-28; ☑May-Sep) This is the gourmet choice in Porto-Vecchio, with excellent meat dishes, cheese and charcuterie platters, homemade ravioli with Brocciu cheese and great salads. Wine enthusiasts will love the selection of local wines.

Sous La Tonnelle

MODERN CORSICAN €€

(☎04 95 70 02 17; rue Abbattucci; mains €13-25; ☑closed Sun & Mon low season) Alfresco on a little vine-clad pavement terrace or inside the pretty dining room decorated with earthy tones, dining at this cosy eatery is a treat – you'll be delighted with a fine selection of fish and meat renditions of Corsican staples that sing in the mouth.



Drinking & Entertainment

Night owls will be pleased to know that the city has a well-established party reputation during the season. There's no shortage of hip cafés around place de la République, in the Upper Town, as well as along the seafont. For something more authentic, make a beeline for **La Taverne du Roi** (☑from 10pm), an intimate place tucked into the Porte Génoise, which features Corsican singing with guitar accompaniment.

On the southern outskirts of Porto-Vecchio, **Via Notte** (www.vianotte.com; rte de Porra; ☑daily in season) is the hottest club in Corsica, and one of the most famous in the Med. With up to 5000 revellers and superstar DJs most nights in summer, it has to be seen to be believed.



Information

Tourist office (www.destination-sudcorse.com; rue Camille de Rocca Serra; ☑9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) Closed Sunday out of season.



Getting There & Away

AIR Figari-Sud Corse airport (www.figari.aeroport.fr) is about 25km from Porto-Vecchio,

near the village of Figari. Daily flights from mainland France, plus charter flights in summer from other European countries, serve both Porto-Vecchio and Bonifacio. See also p971.

BOAT Ferries run to/from Marseille to Porto-Vecchio. For more, see p873.

BUS Les Rapides Bleus (☎04 95 70 10 36; rue Jean Jaurès) operates a service (daily except Sunday and public holidays in winter) to Bastia (three hours). It also operates a shuttle service to Plage de Palombaggia and Plage de Santa Giulia in summer (€7 return, four shuttles daily).

Balési Évasion (☎04 95 70 15 55; rte de Bastia) has buses to Ajaccio via the Alta Rocca. Buses depart daily in July and August, and on Monday and Friday only in winter. **Eurocorse** (☎04 95 71 24 64; rue Pasteur) operates a service to Ajaccio (3½ hours) via Sartène. In summer there are four departures daily Monday to Saturday (two on Sunday and public holidays). In the other direction, buses run twice daily to Bonifacio (30 minutes).

CORTE AREA

Corte (Corti)

POP 5700 / ELEVATION 400M

Secretive. Inward looking. Staunchly Corsican. In many ways, the mountain town of Corte feels different to other Corsican cities. This is the heart and soul of Corsica. It has been at the centre of the island's fortunes since Pascal Paoli made it the capital of his short-lived Corsican republic in 1755, and it remains a nationalist stronghold.

Beautifully positioned at the confluence of several rivers, Corte is blessed with an awesome setting. The fairytale sight of the citadel atop a craggy mount that bursts forth from the valley is sensational. Despite its isolation, the town is also full of atmosphere. Its sizeable student population gives it a special buzz during term time. In summer, it's mainly tourists who make their base here, eager to explore the Restonica and Tavignano Valleys just on the outskirts of town.

Sights & Activities

Citadel

HISTORIC NEIGHBOURHOOD

Of Corsica's six citadels, Corte's is the only one not on the coast. Jutting out above the Rivers Tavignanu and Restonica and the cobbled alleyways of the Haute Ville, the citadel's highest point is the **château** (known as the Nid d'Aigle – the Eagle's Nest), built in 1419.

The town's finest views are from the **belvédère** (viewing platform), reached via a steep staircase just outside the citadel's ramparts. Inside the walls are the former barracks and administrative buildings, which previously served as a WWII prison and a French Foreign Legion base. They now house the tourist office and the **Museu di a Corsica** (Museum of Corsica; ☎04 95 45 25 45; admission €5.50; ☀10am–8pm summer, closed Mon shoulder seasons, closed Sun & Mon winter), a definite must-see for anyone interested in Corsica's culture. It houses an outstanding exhibition on Corsican traditions, crafts, agriculture and anthropology. The building has two main galleries, with a third space allocated to temporary exhibitions.

Cours Paoli

STREET

A gentle wander along the main strip makes a pleasant prelude to an aperitif or a fine meal at one of the town's good restaurants. Start from place Paoli, Corte's focal point, which is dominated by a **statue of Pascal Paoli**, and stroll down the cours. It's a short walk, but allow plenty of time as there are lots of temptations along the way.

Place Gaffory

SQUARE

At the foot of the citadel is place Gaffory, a lively square lined with restaurants and cafés and dominated by the **Église de l'Annonciation**, built in the mid-15th century. The walls of nearby houses are pockmarked with bullet holes, reputedly from Corsica's war of independence.

Outdoor Activities

The Corte area is a mecca for the skittish. Canyoning, walking, rock climbing and mountain biking are all available in the nearby valleys. Contact outfitters **Altipiani** (www.altipiani-corse.com; 5 rue du Pr Santiaggi) for details.



Sleeping

Chambre d'hôte Osteria di l'Orta – Casa Guelfucci

B&B €€

(☎04 95 61 06 41; www.osteria-di-l-orta.com; d €85; ☼☼☼) Inside a powder-blue townhouse on the N193, this peach of a B&B is run by a charming couple with a keen designer's eye. The four rooms (named after local notables) are lovely, with polished wood floors, gleaming walls and great showers, but for real luxury, go for the massive Pascal Paoli suite. At the end of the day, make sure you treat yourself to

a copious dinner (€26) taken in the dining room, below the main building, with its vast bay windows; the delicious Corsican specialities are made using the finest local produce.

Hôtel du Nord

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 46 00 68; www.hoteldunord-corte.com; 22 cours Paoli; d incl breakfast €80-100; ☹☹) Never mind the busy thoroughfare in summer and the somewhat-peeling fa-

WORTH A TRIP

L'ALTA ROCCA

If you've had a temporary surfeit of superb seascapes, take a couple of days to explore the Alta Rocca, north of Porto-Vecchio. Here you can really feel a sense of wilderness, a world away from the bling and bustle of the coast. At the south of the long spine that traverses the island, it's a bewildering combination of dense, mixed evergreen-deciduous forests and granite villages strung over rocky ledges.

Leave Porto-Vecchio by the winding D368 that will take you to the calm surroundings of **L'Ospédale**, at an altitude of about 1000m. The village is close to the **Forêt de L'Ospédale**, which offers excellent walking opportunities and tranquil picnic spots. Follow signs to **Zonza**, a quintessential village mountain with the soaring Aiguilles de Bavella as a backdrop. Zonza is a perfect base for exploring the Alta Rocca, with a good range of restaurants and accommodation options. **L'Aiglon** (☎04 95 78 67 79; mains €16-23, menu €23; ☹Apr-Oct) is the best place around to sample a refined Corsican meal. About 2km from Zonza, **Chambre d'hôte de Cavanello** (☎04 95 78 66 82; www.locationzonza.com; d €60-70; ☹☹) features nine cosy rooms and several hectares of meadows and forests.

Another little charmer is the nearby village of **Quenza**. It's cradled by thickly wooded mountains and the Aiguilles de Bavella loom on the horizon. If you're after a typically Corsican atmosphere and the most tranquil location imaginable, at an altitude of about 1200m, bookmark **Chez Pierrot** (☎04 95 78 63 21; Għjallicu; d incl half board €110), southern Corsica's most idiosyncratic venture. This multifaceted place – *gîte*, B&B, restaurant (meals €23) and equestrian centre – is run by charismatic Pierrot, a local character who's been living here since his early childhood. It's on Plateau de Għjallicu, about 5km uphill from Quenza (it's signposted).

From Zonza or Quenza, it's a short drive to the **Col de Bavella** (Bavella Pass; 1218m), from where you can marvel at the iconic **Aiguilles de Bavella** (Bavella Needles). Jabbing the skyline at an altitude of more than 1600m, these granite pinacles resemble giant shark's jaws and are, unsurprisingly, an all-time photographic favourite. The Bavella area is also a fantastic playground. Walking, rock-climbing, canyoning or simply picnicking... it can all be done in the vicinity of the col. You can recharge the batteries at the **Auberge du col de Bavella** (☎04 95 72 09 87; www.auberge-bavella.com; mains €10-25; ☹Apr-Oct), a typical Corsican inn that serves excellent meat dishes.

For culture vultures, **Levie** is a definite must-see, with an interesting museum and a lovely archaeological site amid superb scenery. The well-organised **Musée de l'Alta Rocca** (admission €4; ☹9am-6pm daily May-Oct, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat Nov-Apr) does a good job of elucidating Corsican geology, climate, flora and fauna. It also features ethnology and archaeology sections. After a visit to the museum, head to the archaeological site of **Pianu di Levie** (see boxed text p888), about 7km to the north (it's signposted). Here you can get a feel for what life was like in ancient times in Corsica. Levie has one of Corsica's most attractive accommodation options, **A Pignata** (☎04 95 78 41 90; www.apignata.com; rte du Pianu; d €110-260; ☹Apr-Oct; ☹☹). This boutique-style inn offers superb rooms and splendid suites, and the on-site restaurant (*menu* €38) rates as one of the best in southern Corsica.

From Levie, drive to **Ste-Lucie de Tallano**, which has a few monuments worthy of interest, including the well-proportioned **Église Ste-Lucie** and the Renaissance-style **Couvent St-François**, an imposing building scenically positioned at the edge of the village.

cade – the grande dame of Corte's sleeping scene is kept shipshape. It has a cache of cheerful and spacious rooms with contemporary colour schemes and all the creature comfort.

Hôtel Duc de Padoue

HOTEL €€

(☎04 95 46 01 37; www.ducdepadoue.com; place Padoue; d €92-123; 🍷🍷) Don't be deterred by the scruffy facade of this professionally run abode. Renovated throughout a few years ago, the hotel has an inviting interior that offers well-equipped rooms, flat-screen TVs, plump bedding, muted tones and squeaky-clean bathrooms.

Camping Saint-Pancrace

CAMPGROUND €

(☎04 95 46 09 22; per tent/person/car €6/3/3; ☀Jun-Sep) The pick of Corte's campsites, with lots of pleasant sites sheltering under olive trees and green oak. It's a 20-minute walk north of town, in a peaceful neighbourhood. The owners run a small dairy farm – if you're after local cheese, this place is hard to beat.



Eating

Pâtisserie Casanova

PASTRY SHOP €

(☎04 95 46 00 79; 6 cours Paoli; pastries from €2; ☀7am-7pm Mon-Sat) Gourmands, you'll be in seventh heaven! Back home, don't tell your dietician that you couldn't resist the *falculella* (a Corsican dessert made with Brocciu and chestnut flour) at this longstanding pastry shop (it's been around since 1887). It also doubles as a coffee lounge – perfect for a gourmet coffee break after exploring central Corte.

Le 24

MODERN CORSICAN €€

(☎04 95 46 02 90; 24 cours Paoli; mains €13-24, menus €18-25; 🌙closed Sun lunch Sep-Jun) After something upmarket? Then swing by this snazzy spot on the main drag. It boasts contemporary furnishings, a sexy atmosphere and an innovative menu that uses top-quality ingredients and changes with the season. The house desserts, chalked up on the blackboard, hit the right spot.

A Scudella

MODERN CORSICAN €€

(☎04 95 46 25 31; 2 place Paoli; mains €10-17, menus €13-23; ☀Mon-Sat) This snug place on Corte's liveliest square owes its reputation to a carefully composed menu, based solidly on good-quality local produce. The decor in the dining room won't win any prizes, but the outdoor seating is pleasant enough.



Drinking

There's a lively bar scene along cours Paoli. The unfussy **Café du Cours** (22 cours Paoli) is a great place to watch the world go by, while the sleek **Le Rex Lounge** (1 cours Paoli) serves excellent cocktails.



Information

Tourist office (www.centru-corsica.com; citadelle; ☎10am-5pm Mon, Wed & Sat, 9am-7pm Tue, Thu & Fri Jul & Aug, closed Sat & Sun Sep-Jun)



Getting There & Away

BUS The most useful bus service is run by **Eurocorse** (☎04 95 31 73 76) from Ajaccio to Bastia stopping at Corte en route (two hours). There are two daily buses except on Sunday. **Transports Mordiconi** (☎04 95 48 00 44) links Corte with Porto (2¾ hours) once daily except on Sunday from July to mid-September, leaving from outside the train station.

TRAIN The train station is east of the city centre. Destinations include Bastia (two hours, three to four daily) and Ajaccio (two hours, three to four daily).

Around Corte

Here in the mountainous area around Corte you'll find fresh mountain air, deep forests, picturesque valleys and abundant hiking trails. You come here to enjoy the scenery and rejuvenate mind and body in a pristine environment.

VALLÉE DE LA RESTONICA

The Vallée de la Restonica is one of the prettiest spots in all Corsica. The river, rising in the grey-green mountains, has scoured little basins in the rock, offering sheltered pinewood settings for bathing and sunbathing alike. From Corte, the D623 winds its way through the valley for 15km to the **Bergeries de Grotelle** (1375m), where a car park (€5) and a huddle of shepherds' huts (three of which offer drinks, local cheeses and snacks) mark the end of the road. From them, a path leads to a pair of picture-pretty glacial lakes, **Lac de Melu** (1711m), reached after about one hour, and **Lac de Capitellu** (1930m), 45 minutes' walk further on.

There are a couple of tempting sleeping choices in the early reaches of the valley, including **Les Jardins de la Glacière** (☎04 95 45 27 00; www.lesjardinsdelaglaciere.com; d €85-100; ☀Apr-mid-Nov; 🍷🍷🍷), which has clean, fresh rooms, impeccable communal areas

and a fantastic location by the river (avoid the rooms facing the road, though).

VALLÉE DU TAVIGNANO

If you have a day to spare, do not miss the opportunity to hike into the car-free (and much quieter than Restonica) Vallée du Tavignano. Corsica's deepest gorge is only accessible on foot and remains well off the beaten track, despite being on Corte's doorstep. From Corte, the signposted track leads to the **Passerelle de Rossolino** footbridge, reached after about 2½ hours. It's an idyllic spot for a picnic, and there's plenty of transparent green natural pools in which you can dunk yourself. The valley can also be explored on horseback; contact **L'Albadu** (www.hebergement-albadu.fr).

[hebergement-albadu.fr](http://www.hebergement-albadu.fr); ancienne rte d'Ajaccio, Corte) for more information.

VIZZAVONA

South of Corte, the N193 climbs steeply in the shadow of Monte d'Oro (2389m) before arriving at the cool mountain hamlet of Vizzavona. A mere cluster of houses and hotels around a train station, Vizzavona is an ideal base to explore the **Forêt de Vizzavona**, where the 1633 hectares are covered mainly by beech and laricio pines. A magnet for walkers, it features lots of excellent hikes. Look for the signpost indicating a short, gentle path that meanders down through a superb forest to **Cascades des Anglais**, a sequence of gleaming waterfalls.